

Reading Instruction and Instructors' Perceptions of Learners' Needs in LINC Level 1-3  
Classes

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates instructors' perceptions of reading instruction and difficulties among Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Level 1-3 learners. Statistics Canada reports that 60% of immigrants possess inadequate literacy skills. Newcomers are placed in classes using the Canadian Language Benchmarks but large, mixed-level classes create little opportunity for individualized instruction, leading some clients to demonstrate little change in their reading benchmarks. Data were collected (via demographic questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, teaching plans, and field study notes) to create a case study of five LINC instructors' perceptions of why some clients do not progress through the LINC reading levels as expected and how their previous experiences relate to those within the LINC program. Qualitative analyses of the data revealed three primary themes: client/instructor background and classroom needs, reading, strategies, methods and challenges, and assessment expectations and progress, each containing a number of subthemes. A comparison between the themes and literature demonstrated six areas for discussion: (a) some clients, specifically refugees, require more time to progress to higher benchmarks; (b) clients' level of prior education can be indicative of their literacy skills; (c) clients with literacy needs should be separated and placed into literacy-specific classes; (d) evidence-based approaches to reading instruction were not always evident in participants' responses, demonstrating a lack of knowledge about these approaches; (e) first language literacy influences second language reading acquisition through a transfer of skills; and (f) collaboration in the classroom supports learning by extending clients' capabilities. These points form the basis of recommendations about how reading instruction might be improved for such clients.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT OF THE INQUIRY**

Participants in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program come from many different countries representing varied cultural, educational and social backgrounds and life experiences. In addition, these newcomers represent various categories of immigration status (CIC, 2004). These differences can manifest themselves in a variety of ways in the classroom, affecting the way in which LINC clients learn and demonstrate progress. This case study explored five LINC instructors' perceptions regarding reading instruction and reading difficulties. The purpose of this inquiry was to investigate the nature of reading instruction provided in LINC Level 1-3 classrooms, and to explore the instructors' perceptions of how effectively the instruction met clients' needs in the LINC Level 1-3 classes. The reasons behind identified instructional challenges were also explored along with any strategies and interventions used to mitigate these difficulties.

### **Background of the Study**

This section provides the context for the study and will focus on the instructors' perceptions of effective reading instruction and reading difficulties among clients in LINC Level 1-3 classes. Newcomers to Canada are eligible to participate in LINC classes within their community. Newcomers must be 18 years of age or older and be classified as either a Permanent Resident (formerly a Landed Immigrant) or a Convention Refugee to participate. These classes are federally funded through Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to provide newcomers with English language instruction in a settlement context (i.e., community-based and cultural information about Canada combined with "survival" English). LINC clients must first be assessed by a LINC



assessor before being placed into an appropriate LINC level class, within a local LINC provider which also provides any other necessary services, including transportation assistance and/or childminding (CIC, 2010).

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB, Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks [CCLB], 2000) comprise the theoretical framework used for assessing clients' proficiency in English. Assessments are completed for initial placement; in addition, formative and summative assessments are completed on an ongoing basis while clients are in the LINC program. The benchmarks include 12 levels of proficiency with three stages of proficiency: basic, intermediate, and advanced. There are also four phases of literacy levels that precede the basic proficiency benchmark stages including: the Foundation Phase, Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III. The correspondence between the CLBs and the LINC levels is based upon a conversion of benchmarks into LINC levels (see Figure 1). An appreciation of the CLBs and of how the LINC program is organized based upon these benchmarks is necessary in order to understand how LINC classes are operated and organized.

### **Problem Situation**

The ability to decode is an essential skill for deriving meaning from text (Catts & Kamhi, 2005; Shaywitz, 2003). As Canada is a highly literate country, the ability to read is not only essential for full participation within Canadian society but also for full participation within the educational system (Statistics Canada–Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005). Formal classroom-based education, which includes LINC classes, requires that clients outside of the literacy level

Skill Area		LINC 1 (CLB 1)	LINC 2 (CLB 2)	LINC 3 (CLB 3,4)	LINC 4 (CLB 4,5)	LINC 5 (CLB 5,6)	LINC 6 (CLB 6,7)	LINC 7 (CLB 7,8)
Speaking	Entry	pre CLB 1	2	3,4	5	6	7	8
	Objectives*	CLB 1	2	3,4	5	6	7	8
	Exit	CLB 1	2	4	5	6	7	8
Listening	Entry	pre CLB 1	2	3,4	5	6	7	8
	Objectives*	CLB 1	2	3,4	5	6	7	8
	Exit	CLB 1	2	4	5	6	7	8
Reading	Entry	pre CLB 1	2	3	4	5	6	7,8
	Objectives*	CLB 1	2	3	4	5	6	7,8
	Exit	CLB 1	2	3	4	5	6	8
Writing	Entry	pre CLB 1	2	3	4	5	6	7,8
	Objectives*	CLB 1	2	3	4	5	6	7,8
	Exit	CLB 1	2	3	4	5	6	8

Figure 1. National language instructions for newcomers to Canada—Placement grid.<sup>a</sup>

From Center for Canadian Language Benchmarks (2007); national operational guidelines approved February 2007. Reprinted with permission.

\* Curriculum objectives.

classes possess the ability to decode and comprehend, so that they may read to continue learning.

LINC clients represent various nations and cultures and have varied exposure to formal education prior to their arrival in Canada. These previous educational experiences, as well as instructors' perceptions of these experiences may hold valuable information about how to create more effective placement for learners with reading difficulties and/or difficulties with other literacy skills. Thus, this study sought to investigate LINC instructors' perceptions of reading instruction and reading difficulties in the LINC 1-3 classrooms.

### **Problem Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, understand, and describe LINC instructors' perceptions of reading instruction and reading difficulties in the LINC program. Data gathered from LINC instructors allowed for the exploration and understanding of the nature of reading instruction and clients' reading difficulties in context of LINC Levels 1-3 classes. In addition, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. Does the reading instruction of these instructors reflect evidence-based practices?
2. Why do some clients fail to progress through the LINC reading benchmark levels as expected?
3. How do the previous educational and life experiences of LINC clients in LINC Level 1-3 classes relate to their experiences in the LINC program and contribute to their progress in the program, especially when this progress is slower than expected?
4. How does the instructors' understanding of the learners' previous educational experiences provide insight into clients' progress in the LINC program?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework underpinning of this study is a combination of constructivism and critical theory. The perceptions of LINC instructors were collected and analyzed in order to construct and understand reading instruction at LINC Levels 1-3. A central tenet of constructivist theory states that “students do bring to bear their past experiences (perspectives, beliefs, values, attitudes)—and their understandings of those experiences—in any learning situation; accordingly, meaningful teaching requires some acknowledgment and incorporation of this psychological reality” (Splitter, 2009, p. 139). In this case, the instructors’ experiences were acknowledged and incorporated in an understanding of reading instruction in the LINC program. A case study approach was used as it allowed for an examination of each case before a comparative and contrastive analysis was applied to discover differences and similarities across cases. The semi-structured interview process allowed the participants to construct meaning from the discussion surrounding the research questions and the review of teaching exemplars. Kelly (1969) stated that “life is characterized by the person’s continuous struggle to make sense of his or her tangible world of experience; it is this quality of life that enables persons to shape their own destiny” (p. 217). Once the themes were identified, the participants were then asked to respond to and reflect on the themes, providing them with the opportunity to member check and co-construct the themes.

Critical theory allowed for a broader understanding of diversity through exploring the perceived experiences of learners from different countries representing diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, and educational backgrounds. Critical theory places the experiences of the individual at the heart of learning and instructional design, which can

facilitate a greater sense of inclusion through a broader understanding and acceptance of diverse backgrounds (Brookfield, 2005; Freire, 1985). In the case of LINC classes, critical theory might also be used to acknowledge and explore the experiences of clients who may have previously been or who are currently marginalized on the basis of their socioeconomic status, religion, gender, or culture. LINC classes are not only intended to provide clients with language instruction, but also to provide them with the tools and information that they need to become full members of Canadian society.

### **Rationale**

Based on my experiences as a LINC instructor, I questioned whether the LINC instructors would be able to meet the needs of their clients with literacy needs who are placed into mainstream classes. Condelli, Wrigley, and Yoon (2008) and Wrigley (2008) found that mainstream English as a second language (ESL) classrooms did not serve the needs of English language literacy learners as they required clients to acquire literacy skills at the same time as learning English. Millar (2007) similarly found that clients with literacy needs did not have the skills to manage in mainstream classes. Placing clients into classrooms on the basis of proficiency scores only resulted in clients with little education being placed in the same classes as clients with more education (but who had a similar level of English proficiency).

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC, 2009), the number of immigrants entering Canada with less than 12 years of prior education has remained fairly stable from 1999 to 2008, with 14.6% of immigrants having between 0-9 years of experience and 15.8% having between 10-12 years of prior education in 2008. Within specific immigration categories, however, these trends are more varied. For instance,

while the percentage of refugees with 10-12 years of education has remained relatively stable from 1999 to 2008, the percentage of refugees with 0-9 years of education has increased from 24.8% in 1999 to 34.8% in 2008. Infante (2000) found that individuals with fewer than 12 years of prior education are likely to have literacy needs in their first language. This implies that a large number of clients in LINC classes have literacy needs in their first language in addition to a need to learn English.

These statistics hold true in my experience. While teaching a mixed-level LINC Level 1-3 class, I found that a number of clients were unable to complete many of the daily classroom tasks as they lacked the ability to read and write well in their first language. Some clients were quite proficient in terms of their listening and speaking benchmarks, but did not possess the same level of proficiency in their reading and writing benchmarks. In addition, some of these clients made protracted progress, particularly with respect to the reading benchmarks, showing little to no progress after more than a year in the same level. Unfortunately, many of these clients were not placed into one of the four LINC Literacy phases, but rather were placed into mainstream LINC Level classes, which presumed that basic literacy skills were already in place as the clients did not self-identify as having literacy needs during the initial assessment.

A recent study conducted by CIC (2009) found that differences in performance existed between different immigration status categories. The number of hours required to complete a LINC Level correlated negatively with the LINC Level, with the lower LINC levels (i.e., LINC Levels 1-3) requiring more hours to complete than the higher LINC levels (i.e., LINC Levels 4-7). The researchers also found that each LINC level contained a unique client profile, with higher-level LINC classes containing more skilled

workers and lower LINC Levels containing more refugee and family class immigrants. It was also found that refugees required 70-80 additional hours of instruction to complete a LINC Level compared to other immigrant categories. The number of refugee class immigrants to Canada has increased by 6% between 2003 and 2008. Thus, it would appear that an increasing number of refugee class immigrants with relatively few years of education and substantial literacy needs are finding their way to LINC classes.

I also noted that I received little background information about my clients prior to their entry to my class and that only limited information was collected during the initial assessment that could later be accessed by the instructor. While in some instances, information could be collected directly from the LINC clients, this was not always possible due to clients' limited English proficiency, unwillingness to share such information, lack of self-awareness, inability to articulate their backgrounds, and/or lack of time. Several researchers have investigated the effects of marginalization, persecution, genocide, and displacement on clients' progress in the LINC classroom (Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, 2004). Others have explored the role of home, work and education environments and sociocultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as first language literacy level, oral proficiency in English, goals for learning English, and transfer between the learners' first language and English on progress in ESL classrooms (Burt, Kreeft Peyton, & Adams, 2003).

Robson (1982) and Strucker (2002) found that the learners' first language influenced the acquisition of their English-language reading skills. Grabe and Stoller (2002) similarly found that the level of first language literacy affected the transfer of reading skills between the first and second language. When literacy skills are fully

developed in the first language, the transfer of reading skills from the first to second language is implicit. They also found that educational background was important in determining reading proficiency, with formal education enhancing students' learning experiences and providing opportunities for the acquisition and development of reading skills.

### **Importance of Study**

According to Jangles Productions (2006), most immigrants and refugees with literacy needs attended mainstream classes, and 70% of the literacy classes were mixed-level classes combined with mainstream (i.e., non-literacy level) classes. This is problematic as mixed-level classes amplify the spectrum of client needs within the classroom. Also, mainstream classes are not designed to develop literacy skills in clients who do not have fully developed first language literacy skills. In addition, complications arise when clients demonstrate mixed abilities across the four skill levels of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Although some of these clients may have strong listening and speaking skills, their reading and writing skills may be less proficient. Thus, a proficiency-based placement system placed clients with potentially very different backgrounds but of a similar level of English proficiency in the same class, creating situations where clients with more education were in the same class as less educated clients with literacy needs.

The amount of time required by clients with literacy needs to progress through the benchmarks typically is greater than for other students, making the progress of these clients markedly slower than that of clients without similar literacy needs (CIC, 2009). This study was intended to provide a better understanding of LINC instructors'



perceptions of effective reading instruction and the characteristics of clients who struggle to make progress in reading in mainstream LINC Level 1-3 classes.

### **Scope and Limitations**

Participation in this study was restricted to LINC instructors who currently were teaching or who had taught in LINC Levels 1-3 classrooms over the past two years. No other LINC levels were examined, limiting the results to LINC Levels 1-3. By including a case study analysis of the five participants, an in-depth understanding of their perceptions regarding reading instruction and reading difficulties was obtained. However, the small sample size and narrow geographical range limited the ability to generalize the results of this study to other LINC providers. While the views expressed by these participants may not be representative of all LINC instructors, it is hoped that their perceptions provide insights to other instructors, administrators, assessors, and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) trainers. In addition, as I have worked for several years in the LINC program and spent a significant part of this time working in LINC Level 1-3 classes, I chose to act as a participant in this inquiry. Participating in this research study provided me with the opportunity to contribute my prior classroom experiences to this discussion. Specifically, it revealed my subjectivity to the research questions and allowed my responses to be contrasted against those of other participants.

### **Outline of the Remainder of the Document**

The general nature of reading instruction and reading difficulties in LINC Level 1-3 classes was discussed in this chapter. In addition, the chapter provided a brief overview of the research framework, as well as my experiences working in LINC Level

1-3 classes. This chapter concluded with an overview of the scope of this inquiry, which is limited to the perceptions of LINC instructors.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature. The review includes literature from multiple disciplines including applied linguistics, adult education, critical theory, psychology, and reading, with these areas informing and guiding the inquiry (e.g., applied linguistics was consulted for information about first and second language acquisition; adult education and critical theory were consulted to provide an appropriate educational context; psychology was consulted to provide insights about individuals' needs; reading literature was examined to locate evidence-based practices for reading instruction with adult English as a second language learners). The combination of these different domains provided a broader context for examining reading instruction among adult ESL learners with settlement needs in LINC Level 1-3 classes.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and the data collection methods within constructivist and critical theory frameworks. The chapter describes the comparative and contrastive analysis used to compare participants' perceptions as expressed in the interviews, teaching exemplars, field study notes, and participants' lesson reflections. The chapter also discusses issues related to methodological assumptions, limitations, credibility, and ethics.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the inquiry. The results of the individual cases and the analysis are reported, supported by quotations from the interviews and other data sources. The data are organized into the primary themes and subthemes.

Finally, chapter 5 provides a synthesis of the major research conclusions, as well as suggestions for future research and implications resulting from the study. The chapter

also presents general recommendations for improved practices and interventions to LINC clients outside of the LINC Literacy program with literacy needs.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Each year, large numbers of newcomers arrive in Canada. According to the 2006 census (Statistics Canada, 2008), the number of immigrants represented “virtually one in five (19.8%) of the total population, the highest proportions since 1931” (p. 2). Many of these newcomers require further instruction in English in order to acclimate to their new environment and to find employment or pursue higher education. The Canadian government provides funding for such programs under the auspices of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) for Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). For some of these learners, gaining proficiency in the English language alone is insufficient. The backgrounds of newcomers are incredibly diverse, including skilled professionals, economic immigrants looking for greater mobility between socioeconomic groups, and refugees fleeing persecution and strife (CIC, 2009). Immigrants who have had little previous formal education are likely to have gaps in their basic literacy skills, such as the ability to read and write well enough to meet their daily needs in Canada.

This study investigated instructors’ perceptions of clients in LINC Level 1-3 classes who have difficulties in reading that present a persistent challenge to the acquisition of English as a second language. In order to better understand the challenges faced by such learners, I conducted a critical investigation of the relevant literature. This literature included the development of reading in adulthood, first and second language acquisition, adult education principles, critical theory, critical pedagogy, and finally, Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs. This literature is complemented with research completed on reading development in childhood.

The literature related to the first and second language acquisition provides an understanding of how individuals acquire languages and the cognitive differences that exist between first and second language acquisition. As the participants in LINC classes are adults, consideration will also be given to the field of adult education and principles that have been identified as representing best practices for adult instruction. Participants in LINC classes represent diverse backgrounds and experiences that must be taken into consideration as well. Critical theory and critical pedagogy include a view of adult education that is inclusive and takes into account factors such as gender, culture, and the political inequities of marginalized individuals. Critical theory and pedagogy also provide a broader framework for instruction that is able to accommodate more diverse perspectives and does not focus on a typically North American and/or Western perspective. Finally, an examination of Maslow's hierarchy of needs permits a deeper understanding of the needs of individuals who have recently relocated to Canada and are in the process of integrating and re-establishing their lives. Therefore, the various areas of research all have relevance to this research topic and its associated research questions.

### **Adults as Learners**

Scholars such as Knowles (1980) have argued that adults are unique learners with distinct needs and goals that are different from those of children. Knowles clearly distinguished the pedagogical principles often used with children from the andragogical principles he espoused should be used with adults. He believed that instruction must be specifically created to address the spectrum of strategies that are important to adult education and defined what he viewed as the core principles of andragogical practice. These core principles were divided into six broad areas, including the learners' goals, the

learner's self-concept, prior experiences of the learner, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn. These six principles are influenced by learners' experiences as well as situational differences across subject matter. Beyond the learner and situational differences were the goals and purposes for learning, which include individual, institutional, and societal growth.

The characteristics of effective adult education have been discussed by Barlow, Chud, and Gohlich (1988), Coombs (1985), Knowles (1980), Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005), and Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) among others. Barlow et al. divided these characteristics into 12 separate domains. First, they argue that it is important to recognize that adults often chose to become students in order to fulfill a perceived need. Second, adults bring concrete learning needs to the classroom based on their personal and professional needs and experiences, in contrast to the at-times more theoretical needs of elementary and secondary students who, in general, are building general knowledge. Third, adults bring an abundance of life experience and prior knowledge, which is consistent with the largely concrete needs of these learners. Their previous life and work experiences call into question the appropriateness of a purely theoretical basis for instruction as the learning of adults is particularly needs-oriented, "learning is a personal process—but a process that is shaped by the context of adult life and society in which one lives" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 1). Fourth, adults require instruction that reflects their mature nature as well as content that is concrete and addresses their immediate needs and goals as learners. Fifth, adults are more practical learners desiring instruction that is meaningful to their needs and engaging through classroom interactions that are negotiated jointly by the instructor and learners. Adult

learners, unlike younger learners, possess many years of prior learning and often desire to participate in the design and facilitation of their instruction. Sixth, adults, like children, need to have their abilities reinforced by successes in the classroom. Seventh, because of their age and experience, adult learners have more fixed opinions and behaviours. Thus, the classroom must provide a non-threatening environment. Eighth, adult learners are more intolerant of unclear and irrelevant learning objectives. Ninth, adult learners need to establish a positive self-concept within the classroom that is congruent with their identities. Tenth, adults are independent and self-directed learners who desire shared control over the direction and outcomes in the classroom. Eleventh, adult learners may have different physical needs than younger learners because of their age, which may need to be considered. For example, adult learners may experience physical limitations related to vision, hearing, and/or the ability to sit for prolonged periods of time. Finally, adult learners may require more time than younger learners to complete classroom tasks. Adherence to these characteristics is intended to lead to instruction that reflects and respects the mature nature and diverse needs of adult learners.

Pratt (1998) cautioned, however, that these characteristics are not universal. He encouraged educators to acknowledge and accommodate to the diversity among adult learners and to be considerate of the demands of the specific learning situation at hand: “there is no basis for assuming a single, universal perspective on teaching adults. ... What is needed instead is a plurality of perspectives on teaching adults that recognizes diversity within teachers, learners, content, context, ideals and purposes” (pp. 3-4). The principles of adult education as defined by Barlow et al. (1988) and by Merriam et al. (2007) provide a starting point for designing instruction, but educators must be careful

not to assume that they represent a formula for teaching adults. Each learning situation, like each adult, is unique and requires an individualized design. Smith (1983) also emphasized the need to make a distinction between the learner and the process of learning in order to acknowledge that they are not synonymous with one another. Effective adult education by nature should be synonymous with diversity, “learning in adulthood is embedded in its context, a single set of principles is not likely to hold true for the wide-ranging diversity of learners and learning situations” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 422). As adults’ backgrounds are the result of their individual needs and life experiences, these overarching needs should be driving effective instructional design.

Chen, Kim, Moon, and Merriam (2008) similarly found a predominantly homogenous treatment of adult learners in their examination of research. They found that little attention was given to the diversity of older adults vis-à-vis age, sex, race, ethnicity, or intrinsic motivation. This kind of homogeneous conceptualizing of adult learners can be misleading and often results in the creation of learner profiles of “typical” learners (Chen et al., 2008). This can prove dangerous, as differences between individuals as well as across groups will remain ignored, as will sociocultural issues. For instance, Merriam et al. (2007) offered the following definition of a typical learner emerging from study of adult participants, “the profile of the typical adult learner in formal educational activities remains remarkably consistent: white, middle-class, employed, younger, and better educated than the non-participant” (p. 78). Adult learners who do not fit into this profile are, therefore, marginalized by the sort of sweeping generalizations that treat all adult learners as a homogeneous group.



Brookfield (1995) similarly offered some caveats about adult education. He believed that many myths persist in adult education that have led educators and researchers to discount important elements such as culture, ethnicity, personality, and political philosophies. He focused on the four ubiquitous areas of adult education including self-directed learning, critical reflection, experiential learning, and learning to learn. According to Brookfield, an emphasis on self-directed learning discounts the importance of collaborative work and maintains isolated learning experiences. He believed that critical reflection requires further study to examine its uses in adult education and that the process of critical reflection can be made accessible to all educators whether they are elementary school teachers, university professors, or adult education facilitators/instructors. Experiential learning appears to place learners' prior experiences as the keystone for instruction; Brookfield, however, suggests that these experiences are not neutral and must, therefore, be viewed critically. Finally, effective learning requires some level of metacognitive awareness about the self-as-learner and the learning process. Learners need to have some awareness of learning strategies, personal strengths, and weaknesses related to learning in general as well as in their own learning history.

Brookfield (1995; 2006) emphasized the need for research exploring the roles of culture and gender on adult learning, as well as research exploring the nature of life-long learning (i.e., over the entire lifespan), connecting childhood learning to adult learning. Brookfield (2006) later expanded on the concepts of critical reflection and experiential learning by exploring three assumptions related to skillful teaching. The first assumption is that skillful teachers use all available means to help students learn. This assumption

sidesteps the “shoulds” and “should nots” of teaching and allows instructors to embrace what works for a particular group based on group members’ individual needs and experiences (p. 24). Brookfield’s second assumption states that teachers ought to take an approach to instruction that includes critical reflection. Critical reflection helps to hone teachers’ intentions and actions by allowing them to confront the consequences of their instruction through an exploration of four different lenses: those of the students, colleagues, self-perceptions, and finally related literature. Students’ critical reflections possess not only valuable information for teachers but also for the students themselves. The students will be confronted with their own learning styles, strengths, and weaknesses which teachers can then use to moderate and differentiate their instruction to make it appropriate to the group. Participation in the process of critical reflection will also demonstrate to the students how the critical reflection process functions within a classroom. Finally, the third assumption states that teachers must possess some awareness of how students experience learning and how they interpret the actions of their teachers. This allows teachers to empathize with the students by placing the students’ experiences at the centre of learning. Thus, if the focus is placed on the individual experience, the approach to teaching frequently must be altered to accommodate the individuals within a specific group. A generalized approach that sees all students as uniform will devalue individual experiences and reflection.

### **Social Context of Learning**

The social context of learning acknowledges the role of culture in influencing the content and path of development and learning, with attention on individuals as whole learning units (Van Oers, Wordekker, Elbers, & Van der Veer, 2008). Educational

development depends on the individuals' cultural perspective and varies according to the cultural–historical setting in which individuals exist, “people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of the communities, which also change” (Rogoff, 2003, pp. 3-4). The sociocultural orientation originated and is consistent with Vygotsky (1978) who was concerned primarily with the development of children. Although his perspective did not include adults or language instruction specifically, subsequent research has furthered his research and expanded it in these areas.

Vygotsky believed that cultural context and social interaction were essential to individual development. He also stated that education should be meaningful for learners, meaning that it must consider learners' individual perspectives and backgrounds, “it is necessary to develop pedagogy that is attentive to the histories, dreams, and experiences that such students bring to school” (as cited in Giroux, 1997, p. 140). The goal of education is social transformation through a curriculum that is co-created by teachers and students. Nasir and Hand (2006) discussed how culture, learning, and school achievement interact with each other, stating that development occurs on many levels as a result of interaction and is influenced by cultural tools and artifacts. Although culture may transcend generations, it changes in local contexts. Thus, culture is an integral part of individuals and their development.

Another component of the social context of learning is the zone of proximal development (ZPD, Turuk, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) defines the ZPD as, “the distance between a child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem

solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (as cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 60). Within the ZPD, the teacher facilitates learning through mediation and scaffolding. Mediation involves interaction based on language while scaffolding involves the support of a more knowledgeable person. Thus, instruction should be slightly ahead of development and developing functions, “good instruction must always be aimed not so much at developmental but developing functions” (Turuk, 2008, p. 250). Scaffolding is also a carefully negotiated relationship between teachers and learners that evolves continuously to suit learners’ ever-evolving development:

Scaffolding implies the expert’s active stance towards continual revisions of the scaffolding in response to the emerging capabilities of the learner, and a learner’s error or limited capabilities can be a signal for the adult to upgrade the scaffolding. As the learner begins to take on more responsibility for the task, the adult dismantles the scaffold indicating that the child benefitted from the assisted performance and internalised the problem-solving processes provided by the previous scaffold episode. (Turuk, 2008, p. 252)

Critics have attacked the dynamic nature of development within Vygotsky’s social context of learning theory, arguing that educators often view it as too theoretical and impractical as there are no specific instructional methodologies that correspond to its implementation (Degener, 2001). Specifically, the emphasis on meaning-centred learning that is negotiated by individual learners and teachers makes it difficult to apply any kind of universal instructional theory which does not result in a “one size fits all” approach to teaching. Instead, teachers must know the limits of their students and acknowledge that these limits will shift continually as development occurs. As Vygotsky

believed that the context evolved and the participants involved within the context negotiate a collaborative exchange, a definitive, prescriptive, rule-governed methodology would, therefore, be at odds with the theoretical basis of Vygotsky's arguments

Subsequent research has also expanded the social context of learning discipline to include adults and second language instruction. Rather than focusing on teacher-student dynamics, research has focused on novice/expert relationships that involve peer collaboration, "in an L2 classroom, collaborative work among language learners provides the same opportunity for scaffolded help as in the novice-expert relationships in the everyday setting" (Donato, 1994, pp. 252-253). Shayer (2002) extended this concept by suggesting that a classroom setting reflected the collective effort of learners which corresponded particularly well to task-based, meaning-oriented, communicative, and collaborative approaches to learning, "the central focus of a task-based approach is on the class role of interaction and collaboration among peers and how learners scaffold each other through interaction, a point that is essential in Vygotsky's concept of learning" (p. 256).

Seedhouse (2004) added that meaning construction and fluency are the best ways to improve proficiency in a second language. A task-based approach allows for a focus on how the task is completed as well as on how learners can assist each other. Similarly, Zimmerman (1997) warned that focusing on skills only, rather than on meaning construction, competency, fluency, and flexibility, can result in learners failing to make progress and remaining at their current competency level. By focusing on meaning construction, students can blend new information with old information and internalize the

new language. The internalization of language is also seen to be critically important as it allows a learner to connect learning with previous concepts and ideas, thereby

focusing on language structure into abstract thinking, whereby students can have personal appreciation of the language, consequently developing a self-motivated attitude to learning the language. Lack of motivation experienced by some L2 students could be partly attributed to over-emphasis on teaching language structure which is ineffective in setting to motion students' intellectual abilities. (Turuk, 2008, p. 256)

Although instruction is a crucial part of second language learning, learning also needs to be collaborative, drawing on metacognitive skills that transform learning. Learners need to use their metacognitive skills, including planning, problem-solving, and evaluation in order to internalize a second language and create meaning, “not just with theories of instruction, but with learning to learn, developing skills and strategies to continue to learn, with making learning experiences meaningful and relevant to the individual, with developing and growing as a whole person” (Williams & Burden, 1997, as cited in Turuk, 2008, p. 247). Learners must be problem solvers and meaning makers drawing on their previous metacognitive experiences. Ellis (2000) also discussed the importance of internalizing language. He stated that learning occurs in interactions with others that mediate learning, and allow learners to internalize what has been modelled through scaffolding and, thus, make connections to previous knowledge. Freire (2005) also commented on the relationship between content and learner level with respect to reading:

There is a necessarily a relationship between the level of content in a book and the reader's actual level of development. These levels depend on the intellectual experience of both reader and author. The comprehension of what is read is tied to this relationship. When those levels are too far apart, when one has nothing to do with the other, all efforts toward comprehension are fruitless. (p. 42)

Freire's description echoes Vygotsky's ZPD with its negotiated relationship between teachers and learners and learners and content.

Gillette (1994) conducted a study that explored the role of learner goals with respect to students' success in second language learning. Gillette's study examined the experiences of three successful language learners and three unsuccessful language learners and qualified how the learners' different goals led to different approaches to language learning and, ultimately, different levels of success. The whole picture of the students' language learning efforts was explored through an examination of successes, failures, personal view, worldview, motivations, intentions, and classroom behaviours. Gillette found that the students' initial motivation dictated the character of the learning activity:

If two students are asked to write as essay in a second language class, but one student's motive for being in the class is simply to fulfill a requirement while the other genuinely desires to learn the language, they are not engaged in the same activity. The resulting essays may appear similar on the surface, but different learning outcomes can be expected when learners have such divergent orientations to the task. (Galperin, 1980, as cited in Gillette, p. 196)

Gillette's (1994) study also considered the social environment of the learners as well as their orientation towards language learning, previous language learning histories, and attitudes and motivation, "their life circumstances, therefore, cannot be excluded from investigations of L2 [second language] success" (p. 198). Gillette also considered the implementation of metacognitive strategies by second language learners and noted some important differences in the reading strategies used by successful and not-so-successful learners:

While effective language learners seem to integrate old and new material through active language use, ineffective learners do not link new information effectively to what they already know. In fact, such learners often behave as if they had no internal representation of the target language at all and were forced constantly to start over, with the L1 [first language] as their only point of reference. (p. 209)

By combining information about individuals as whole persons, it possible to create instruction that will meet learners' goals and relate the learners' social environment.

Some critical theorists have critiqued a number of aspects of adult education (Brookfield, 1995, 2005; Burbules & Berk, 1999; Collard, 1995; Collins, 1991, 1995; Ellsworth, 1989; Guilherme, 2002; Welton, 1995). In particular, Collins (1995) believed that the characteristics of adult education were too focused on the learning context than on the learners' context, meaning that the individual needs of the learner were not the focus of instruction. He was also critical of the overemphasis on technical (i.e., factual) knowledge at the expense of emancipatory knowledge (i.e., that which challenges the status quo), which creates a "context where shared commitments [practical knowledge] towards a socially more free, just, and rational society will coalesce" (Collins, 1991, p.



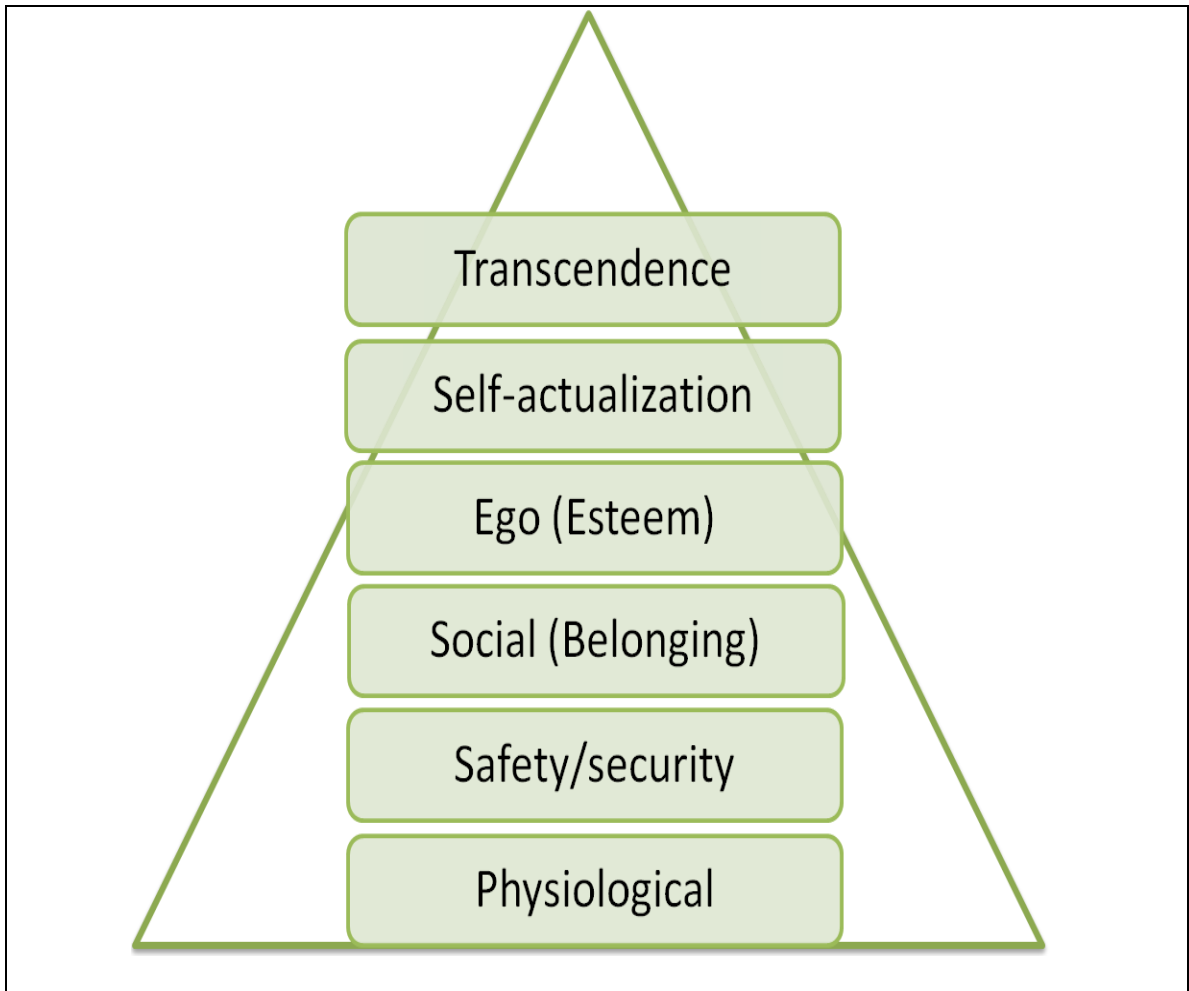
119). Welton (1995) added that adult learning contexts should be ideal settings for reflective dialogue, establishing institutions as learning communities, and uniting the interaction between the system and everyday life. Thus, Welton believed that this would allow and encourage adult learners to be critical of institutions that maintain an unequal balance of power within society. Brookfield (2005) stated that critical theory is by its very nature “also a theory of social and political learning” (p. 31). However, Brookfield cautioned against the tendency to view a theory as fixed,

For critical theory to be critical, it must be on guard against its own ossification and entombment as a “grand theory” meant to explain all social interactions, for all people and for all time. A critical stance toward critical theory entails a productive scepticism regarding its universality and accuracy. (p. 32)

Critics of critical theory, including Ellsworth (1989) and Collard (1995), have focused primarily on the impossibility of creating ideal settings for reflective dialogue in adult classrooms, viewing it as yet another form of hegemony which, “merely reintroduces an old elitism under the guise of a communicative ethic” (Collard, p. 68) and, “tends to disregard difference and exclude those who have no voice” (Collard, p. 65). Ellsworth also stated that critical pedagogy often exists invisibly behind words such as critical and social change when the political agenda is not made explicit. She also commented on the failure of critical pedagogy to clearly describe itself in a way that makes it clear what critical pedagogy can and cannot effectively address, “as a result, the critical education movement has failed to develop a clear articulation of the need for its existence, its goals, priorities, risks or potential” (as cited in Stone, 1994, p. 303).

### **Additional Considerations for Adult Learners**

Newcomers to Canada, regardless of their previous experiences, share the common challenge of rebuilding their lives in a new country. Some newcomers, however, have escaped extremely dire circumstances such as war, genocide, refugee camps, natural disasters, or persecution based on ethnicity, religion, or gender. For these people, acclimatizing to a new country can be a lengthy process (Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, 2004). Maslow (1954) proposed the concept of a hierarchy of needs which included the five levels of basic human needs which was later amended by Maslow and Lowery (1998) to include a sixth level. These needs are generally depicted as a pyramid with the highest level needs at the top and the lowest level needs at the bottom (see figure 2). The lowest level in the hierarchy of needs described by Maslow referred to the physiological needs that related to basic survival such as food, water, shelter, and sleep. The second level described the safety needs related to physical, family, employment, health, and property safety. The third level described the love and belonging needs associated with the relationships of family and friendship. The fourth level described the esteem and ego needs related to self-esteem, self-confidence, achievement, and respect. The fifth level described the needs related to self-actualization, which include problem solving, critical thinking, acceptance, fulfillment, and growth. The final and highest level in the amended conceptualization described the needs related to transcendence, which include altruism, social progress and a broader view of the world. Maslow believed that ascension to the next level was dependent upon having all of the needs of the preceding level met (Maslow & Lowery, 1998). Furthermore, he believed that these needs represented a sort of continuum where



*Figure 2.* Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Adopted from Maslow, A. & Lowery, R. (1998). *Toward a psychology of being* (3rd Ed.). New York, NY: Wiley & Sons.

movement could be either forward or backward depending upon the circumstances of the individual.

For newcomers who have recently arrived in Canada and who may have left their homeland due to extremely difficult circumstances, there may be a return to the most basic needs as they rebuild their lives. This rebuilding process can be slow and challenging and may involve a regression to lower level needs that have not yet been fully met in Canada which will have a profound effect on the ability to learn. If newcomers are focused on meeting the most basic needs (i.e., physiological or safety needs) the ability to attend to acquiring English skills may be hindered. When deficits in reading are also present, another barrier is introduced that will affect the acquisition of English and the ability to acclimatize to Canada. Maslow's hierarchy has, however, been challenged by critics on the grounds that this conceptualization may not be consistent across cultural norms (Trigg, 2004). Specifically, different cultures may place different emphasis on the described human needs. Thus, care must be taken not to assume that this model will represent all individuals. It may, however, shed some light onto the erratic progress that some individuals experience in their language learning due to changes in their personal circumstances as they establish themselves in a new country.

Critical theory is better able to address a broader spectrum of cultural norms, with its acknowledgement that identity has multiple layers including nation, culture, language, class, and race (Guilherme, 2002). Through this lens education is transformative rather than productive by nature and allows for greater inclusiveness. Critical theory seeks to democratize learning and make the learners the agents of societal change in collaboration with teachers, who Freire labelled as cultural workers (as cited in Guilherme, 2002).

For Freire (1985, 1993), acquiring literacy skills involved more than just language. It involves raising one's consciousness, or "conscientisation" in order to transform society both politically and culturally (Bee, 1981, p. 42). Unlike Maslow's conceptualization (Maslow, 1954; Maslow & Lowery, 1998), this occurs at every stage of learning and cannot be divided into discrete groups of needs that are mutually exclusive. While Maslow's theory emphasizes acquisition of the lower levels prior to altruistic and outwardly motivated behaviours, Freire's focus is on the individual's ability to transform the needs of society at large. Thus, while Maslow proposes a hierarchical set of needs, Freire believes these various needs must be addressed simultaneously so as to empower individuals to transform society by reclaiming their voice.

Thus, the question of how best to address diversity is a contentious one with no definitive answers. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), the integration of critical theory into adult learning principles has been hindered by the large amount of literature on the subject and the difficulty in operationalizing such ideas in learning contexts. Critical theory provides a theoretical framework but does not provide a single methodology for realizing the framework, which can hinder its application. In addition to being viewed as too theoretical, critical theory has also been called too directive by some in terms of what it means to be critical and, thus, does not allow for the vision of either the teachers or students (Guilherme, 2002). For many teachers, critical theory is simply too inaccessible and impractical to implement in the classroom.

In summary, adult education is often governed by guiding principles which acknowledge the differences between adult and child learners, such as Knowles's (1980) work which outlined the principles of learners' goals, self-concept, prior experiences, and

readiness, orientation, and motivation to learn which are influenced by individual and situational differences. These principles are realized through characteristics that speak to specific concrete needs of adult learners (Barlow et al., 1988; Coombs, 1985; Merriam et al. 2007). Adults typically have specific concrete needs and goals related to their prior experiences. Adults are often self-directed learners who want to collaborate in the design and facilitation of their learning. Furthermore, adults have specific physical demands and emotional expectations related to learning.

Knowles' principles have been criticized by some critical theorists (Brookfield, 1995, 2005; Collard, 1995; Collins, 1991, 1995; Ellsworth, 1989; Welton, 1995) who have claimed that these principles overgeneralize the needs and characteristics of adults and can lead to generic instruction that does not effectively address adults' needs. Brookfield (1995) specifically discussed the need for greater attention to the effects of gender and culture. He also stated that critical reflection provided adult education with four lenses through which to view adult instruction including: students, colleagues, self, and the relevant literature. Thus, although the literature on adult education has clearly demonstrated the distinctiveness of adult learners, it has not fully addressed the diversity of adult learners. Critical theory can offer a new lens through which diversity may be incorporated in the field of adult education.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Acknowledging diversity is an important issue in adult education, and particularly in a multicultural country such as Canada. Government-funded language classes, such as LINC classes, contain people of different ethnicities, nationalities, and educational and employment backgrounds. Much adult education theory has been criticized for treating

all adults as a homogenous group. Critical theory allows individual experiences to take centre stage through a critical examination of political and social forces underlying learning and instruction, “critical theory springs from the desire to extend democratic socialist values and processes, to create a world in which commitment to the common good is the foundation of individual well-being and development” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 32). Critical pedagogy addresses the inequities of education by questioning the commonly held perception that education is neutral. Gramsci (1957) questioned the notion that education could be viewed as an equalizer in society, as not all individuals are able to access education: “literacy is a double-edged sword for self and empowerment or to perpetuate repression and domination” (as cited in Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 2). Although education and literacy skills have the ability to empower, they may also be utilized as a social practice for privileging those who can and marginalizing those who cannot participate. Thus, education should be viewed as a social construct that has both the capability to empower and repress.

Freire (1985) focused on the dialectical relationship between the individual, on one side, and the world, language, and transformative agency on the other. Freire stated that literacy was not simply a technical skill to be learned but rather an essential cultural act, and also a political act necessary to transform experiences and the society at large. As Freire noted, “the need to master the dominant language is not only to survive but also better to fight for the transformation of an unjust and cruel society where the subordinate group are rejected, insulted and humiliated” (1993, p. 135). He also believed that language and power were inseparable and cautioned that literacy in of itself is insufficient as, “to be literate is not to be free, it is to be present and active in the struggle for

reclaiming one's voice, history and future" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 11). A key component of literacy is becoming self-critical about and incorporating personal experiences with a focus on social justice. Critical literacy begins with questioning power relations, discourse, and identities. Critical literacy involves raising consciousness, or what Freire referred to as "conscientisation," and accurate ways of thinking about reality (as cited in Bee, 1981, p. 42).

The relationship between theory and practice requires thinking about social theory and practice. Theorizing about theory alone would become an abstract process without the benefit of personal experiences. Practice and concrete daily experiences are also essential. Moreover, Freire (1985) stated that illiteracy was the product of objective conditions, meaning that illiteracy could occur through choice or through the denial of opportunity. The choice, as described by Freire, could be the result of a profession or culture that did not value literacy skills, had a predominantly oral tradition, or did not require literacy skills to be successful. Educators need to consider the background and position of individuals in the context of their transformation. The texts used for instruction should also be informed by the context of the individual and presented in a format that challenges the learner, and not presented in a format designed to foster rote memorization of information. Assessments should be formative and evaluate an experience rather than inspect learning. The relationship between the educator and the student was characterized by a reciprocal form of exchange culminating in the mutual development of both parties. Although the educator was a knowledgeable expert, the learning relationship was co-developed with aim of promoting mutual inquiry and a sharing of power. Thus, the pattern of one-way communication and the teacher–student dichotomy was broken.



Freire (1970) stated that there could be change and action through critical awareness. He believed that communication had to be approached as a shared activity, with problems being raised between the students and facilitator. The concept of functional literacy, meaning a level of literacy that allows individuals to perform basic functions in society, was also significant to Freire's critical pedagogy. Freire believed that functional literacy involved predetermined limits that could restrain an individual. However, critical reflection and the quality of reflection involved therein would act as a counterbalance to these limits and allow individuals to move from functional to transformational literacy, thereby allowing them to transform their lives.

Although the Knowlesian branch of adult education has addressed the need for a collaborative relationship between the students and the instructor, and a self-directed instructional focus, the tendency to utilize adult learning principles as an overarching model for adult instruction could lead educators to ignore individual differences and marginalize students who presented with markedly different learner profiles. Participants in LINC classes possess such varied backgrounds. Some have had previous access to schooling while others have not (either through choice, limited access, or denial of access). Education alone is insufficient to transform the lives of these individuals. They need to acquire knowledge and skills that related to their individual circumstances and that allowed their consciousness to be raised so that transformation could occur in their lives. The role of the facilitator was to share inquiry and power to create a mutually transformative and emancipatory experience.

## **Second Language Acquisition in Adult Learners**

Adult learners who learn second or other languages frequently experience difficulties when trying to acquire the new language, resulting in a great deal of variation in proficiency among adults (Schmid, 2009). This is in sharp contrast to children who were generally able to acquire full or native-like proficiency in a new language with little difficulty. Researchers have proposed two contrasting explanations for the inconsistencies between child and adult second language acquisition which reflect the degree of similarity or difference between the representations and cognitive processes associated with the first language and second language (Schmid, 2009). The first of these explanations relates to the idea that there is a critical period during which second language acquisition was optimally effective, often referred to as the Critical Period Hypothesis. This period is typically considered to exist from birth to puberty, with acquisition becoming more challenging from the postpubescent years onward. The second explanation connects the cognitive processing of the second or new language with the already established first language. There are two different memory systems available within the brain that relate to language acquisition, declarative memory and procedural memory (Squire, 1992). Declarative memory includes both the implicit and explicit acquisition of information related to facts and events. Procedural memory includes the implicit acquisition of information related to skills and habits. For native speakers, declarative memory is used to acquire semantic information while procedural memory is used to acquire grammatical information. In contrast, learners of a second or new language acquire grammatical knowledge explicitly by means of declarative memory

(Paradis, 2004; Ullman, 2001). Thus, first and second language learners acquire language using different cognitive processes.

According to Schmid (2009), as learners become more proficient in the second or new language, there is a shift away from declarative memory toward increased use of procedural memory. The main difference between the Critical Period Hypothesis and the cognitive explanation is in which strategies are utilized by the language learner:

Here the competing viewpoints are divided between the approaches which assume the post-puberty L2, [second language], learners use processing strategies which are different from those of early learners or native speakers and those which assume that non-native speakers are constrained by more general demands, such as a higher demand on control mechanisms in bilingual processing and resulting limitations of working memory. (Schmid, p. 214)

Previous research has failed to provide conclusive evidence in support of either of these two explanations. However, clear differences between second language acquisition in adults and children may be observed when proficiency is measured in both groups.

Whether language is processed differently by adults and children, or whether it is subject to a critical period during which acquisition is optimal remains unclear.

When investigating how a second language is acquired, the learner must be considered in addition to the process of learning. How learners approach the process of learning a new language can also affect linguistic achievement (Ellis, 2008). Individual differences can provide information that explains how learners approach language learning and offer explanations regarding what is actually learned; “[individual differences are] partly the product of innate disposition and partly of experience. A

learner's previous education, for instance, may have led her to form certain expectations about what it means to learn in a formal setting" (Ellis, 1992, p. 202). The research exploring learning styles and language learning was limited, however, in that it was difficult to define the constructs related to learning style and measure their influence. Data had typically been collected through instruments that have included surveys, questionnaires, tests, inventories, and models of learning styles (Ellis, 1994, pp. 645-646). The lack of a theoretical framework to establish this branch of second language acquisition research has created a diverse set of core characteristics without a central theory. This has lead Ellis to reconceptualise some of his earlier research on learning styles.

Previously, Ellis (1992) had divided learning styles into two specific orientations: cognitive and affective. Within the cognitive orientation, Ellis distinguished two types of learners ranging across a continuum from experiential and studial. Experiential learners were focused on developing communicative competence whereas studial learners were focused on form and producing accurate language while making conscious comparisons to the first language. Within the affective orientation, learners existed on a continuum between active and passive. Active learners are independent and self-directed while passive learners require input and explanation from an intermediary. Passivity was linked to learners' personalities, as well as their attitudes toward the language, speakers of the language, and style of instruction. Learners' affective orientations, unlike their cognitive orientations, are subject to change: "the degree of activity/passivity is determined to a large extent by local factors in the personal life or the learner and in the learning environment" (Ellis, 1992, p. 205). Ellis (2008) has now stated that there was

little evidence to demonstrate a positive relationship between learning styles and proficiency in a second or new language and that the problem was the result of a lack of clarity on the part of researchers:

One of the major problems is that the concept of “learning style” is ill-defined, apparently overlapping with other individual differences of both an affective and a cognitive nature. It is unlikely that much progress will be made until researchers know what they want to measure. (Ellis, 1994, p. 508)

Thus, the role of learning styles in the development of second languages remains uncertain although they could provide valuable insight into the learner as well as the learning process. They may be able to provide more information about how learners approach learning and how individual learners acquire and develop second languages. This could facilitate a more learner-centred approach to instruction.

### **Second Language Acquisition and Language Skills**

In the instruction of second languages, a language is typically divided up into the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (CCLB, 2000). Listening and reading are referred to as “receptive skills” as this is how learners take in language. Speaking and writing are considered productive skills as this is how learners produce language. For the purposes of this research, the focus will relate only to the skill of reading as the ability to read fluently is essential to the development of all literacy skills: “Reading has, to date, remained the foundation of basic education and the main tool for independent learning throughout the world. This is particularly true of highly literate societies, but even for developing countries” (McKeough, Phillips, Timmons, & Lupart, 2006, p. 154). During the emergent literary period, children begin recognizing sounds

and letters before establishing a connection between the two. The development of fluent reading and comprehension is typically based upon the building blocks established in the emergent period. The ability to read and write develops simultaneously at this time; however, the ability to read letters and words and derive meaning from them transforms scribbling or drawing into writing (Catts & Kamhi, 2005; Johnson, 1999).

Grabe and Stoller (2002) state that, “as we enter a new century, productive and educated citizens will require even stronger literacy skills (including both reading and writing) in increasingly larger numbers of societal settings” (p. 1). Although technology has challenged the way information is conveyed and received, print literacy remains important:

There is still a lot of information in print, and this vast amount of information is not accessible to the non-reader either through a standard or electronic format.

For now and into the foreseeable future, increasing levels of print literacy are required to tap into the mass of information afforded by computer technology and to cope with the daily demands of society. (McKeough et al., 2006, p. 153)

While learners’ listening and speaking proficiencies provide some evidence of their literacy skills, some learners may demonstrate a range of oral proficiencies and yet lack basic reading skills (Burnaby, 1989, 1991; Klassen & Burnaby, 1993). The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of reading instruction and how LINC instructors respond to clients experiencing reading difficulties in context of the LINC classes for learners who are at a LINC level between Levels 1 to 3. Based on my personal experiences as an instructor, I believe that learners with profound literacy needs are often placed in LINC Level 1 to 3 classes.

## **Second Language Learning and Traditional LINC Programs**

In Canada, Permanent Residents (formerly referred to as Landed Immigrants) and Convention Refugees are entitled to enrol in LINC classes, which are funded by CIC, at no cost to the learners (CIC, 2010). LINC classes typically provide free child care and transportation (i.e., bus tickets) to participants. LINC classes are conducted in a variety of settings ranging from school board sites, churches, community colleges, and nonprofit centres.

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs) form the basis for assessment of all learners within the program, although the assessment process varies across centres. Some centres have a central agency that completes all official assessments while other centres have on-site assessors. The CLBs (CCLB, 2000) are a descriptive standard for assessing proficiency in English as a second language. They are learner-centred and task-based. Their use is restricted to assessment and their associated results are not used for curriculum development or instruction. The Toronto District Catholic School Board (2002) has created a set of curriculum guidelines that are used by many LINC providers voluntarily. These guidelines are a thematic treatment of required competencies in all four skills for each benchmark level as described in the CLBs. The CLBs consist of 12 benchmark levels of proficiencies in English as a second language (see figure 3). These proficiencies are subdivided into the basic level benchmarks (CLB 1-4), the intermediate level benchmarks (CLB 5-8), and the advanced level benchmarks (CLB 9-12).

LINC programs, however, typically cease at LINC Level 7, as this level is considered acceptable for entry into most college programs (CCLB, 2007). There is also a

curriculum document designed to assist LINC literacy level instructors using the CLB framework, entitled *The Revised LINC Literacy Component 1997 of the LINC Curriculum Guidelines* (Hutt, Young, & Crawford, 1997). The guidelines describe the four distinct phases of literacy from the Foundation Phase to Phases I, II, and, III (see figure 4).

The CCLB (2005) has stated that many English language learners will require more than six months to improve by a full benchmark:

Progress in language acquisition and communicative proficiency does not occur at a systematic and even pace for most individuals. For many learners an increase by a “Benchmark” in general language ability or a specific skill area will take more than six months of full time instruction. (p. 8)

Watt and Lake (2004) similarly found that progress to higher benchmarks is highly variable, and they also made some important discoveries about factors that influence students’ progress. First, they found that no significant correlation existed between language acquisition and multilingualism and/or linguistic distance (i.e., the similarities or differences between learners’ first languages to the new language). Second, progress became less rapid as higher levels of proficiency were achieved. Finally, the number of years of previous education had the strongest correlation to second language acquisition. Those with less than seven years of prior education made small gains, changing by only 0.4 of a benchmark level with 250 hours of instruction. Thus, this research will investigate instructors’ perceptions of learners’ progress, with particular emphasis on why some learners’ progress becomes extremely slow or even static.



AN OVERVIEW				
BENCHMARK	PROFICIENCY LEVEL	SPEAKING AND LISTENING COMPETENCIES	READING COMPETENCIES	WRITING COMPETENCIES
<b>STAGE I: BASIC PROFICIENCY</b>				
1	Initial	Creating/interpreting oral discourse in routine non-demanding contexts of language use in:	Interpreting simple texts:	Creating simple texts:
2	Developing		• Social interaction texts	• Social interaction
3	Adequate	• Social interaction	• Instructions	• Recording information
4	Fluent	• Instructions	• Business/service texts	• Business/service messages
		• Suasion (getting things done)	• Informational texts	• Presenting information
		• Information		
<b>STAGE II: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY</b>				
5	Initial	Creating /interpreting oral discourse in moderately demanding contexts of language use in:	Interpreting moderately complex texts:	Creating moderately complex texts:
6	Developing		• Social interaction texts	• Social interaction
7	Adequate	• Social interaction	• Instructions	• Reproducing information
8	Fluent	• Instructions	• Business/service texts	• Business/service messages
		• Suasion (getting things done)	• Informational texts	• Presenting information/ ideas
		• Information		
<b>STAGE III: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY</b>				
9	Initial	Creating/interpreting oral discourse in very demanding contexts of language use in:	Interpreting complex and very complex texts:	Creating complex and very complex texts:
10	Developing	• Social interaction	• Social Interaction texts	• Social interaction
11	Adequate	• Instructions	• Instructions	• Reproducing information
12	Fluent	• Suasion (getting things done)	• Business/service texts	• Business/service messages
		• Information	• Informational texts	• Presenting information/ ideas

Figure 3. The Canadian language benchmarks: An overview.

Source: Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. (2000). *Canadian language benchmarks 2000*. Ottawa, ON: Author. Reprinted with permission.

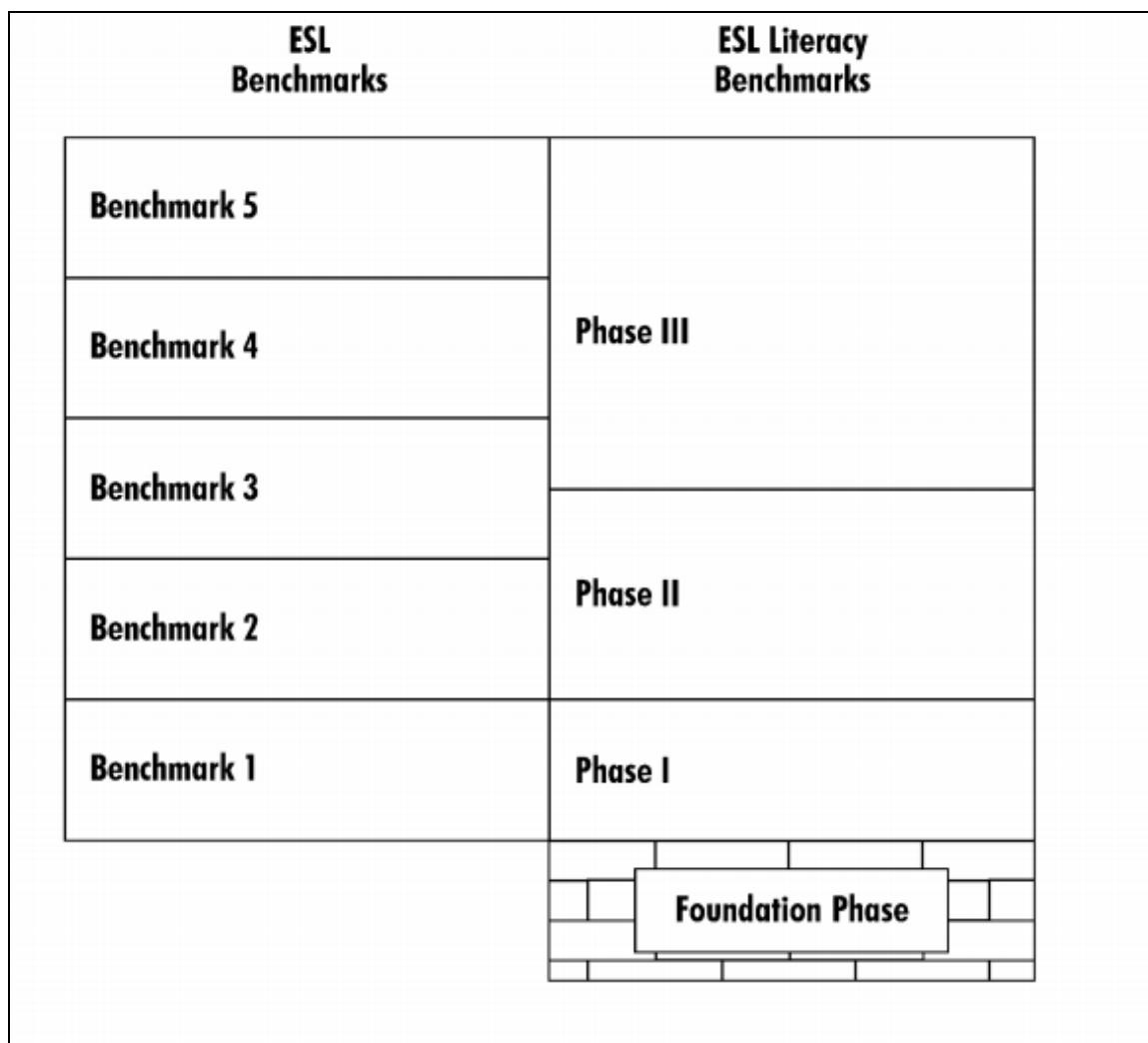


Figure 4. LINC literacy phases.

Source: Hutt, N., Young, L., & Crawford, K. (1997). *The revised LINC literacy component 1997 of the LINC curriculum guidelines*. Ottawa, ON: Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Reprinted with permission.

In a recent study completed by CIC (2009), it was discovered that differences in performance exist across LINC Levels as a function of immigration status (e.g., worker, family, refugee). This study found a negative correlation between LINC levels and the hours required for completion of a LINC level. The completion rates also varied across categories, with 40% of skilled workers and 30% of family class and refugee class clients completing assigned LINC levels. Each LINC level demonstrated a unique profile of client. For example, refugees and family class individuals comprised the majority for classes from the Literacy Level to LINC Level 2. The percentage of skilled workers within this group was 10-25%. Additionally, between 2003 and 2008, 51% of the individuals in the Literacy Level classes were refugees. In classes spanning LINC Level 3 to LINC Level 7, the majority of individuals were skills workers. Thus, the lower level LINC classes have a greater number of refugee and family class individuals. Refugee-class individuals were found to require 70-80 hours of additional instruction more than family class or skill worker class individuals.

Among the LINC level results, the CIC (2009) study showed that the number of refugee-class individuals had increased by 6% between 2003 and 2008 and that the average completion time was 459 hours. Additional time may be required for completion as not all LINC programs are offered full-time, programs have waitlists due to limited classroom space and/or limited child-minding space, and these programs cease during the summer months (CIC, 2010). In addition, individuals' abilities to attend the LINC program on a daily basis may be subject to multiple external factors including employment, health of the individual and/or his/her family members, and transportation. Thus, while the results presented by the CIC (2009) study may provide a general idea of completion times,

they are not absolute. As the CIC (2009) report stated, each LINC level demonstrates a unique profile. This idea may be further generalized in that each LINC class demonstrates a unique profile and, therefore, generalizations across classes and levels must be treated with caution to avoid adopting a “one size fits all” approach.

While there is not a uniformly endorsed approach to instruction, instruction in the field of English as a second language has tended towards the Communicative Approach, also referred to as Task-based Instruction (Higgs & Clifford, 1982). The Communicative Approach (Brown, 2001; Ellis, 2005; Nunan, 2004; Savignon, 2005), can be characterized by four features. First, all classroom goals centre around communicative competence rather than the more traditional focus on grammatical and linguistic competence. Second, tasks and techniques are authentic and functional and geared toward a pragmatic use of language. Third, meaningful communication and fluency supersede the importance of accuracy. Accuracy is still valued, but not viewed as central to the classroom. Finally, learners are required to use language, both receptively and productively, in unrehearsed situations to demonstrate competence.

Task-based instruction is a more recent facet of the Communicative Approach (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Ellis, 2005; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 2003; Willis, 1996). In this approach, instruction focuses on the completion of a pragmatic task that is assessed through a set of outcomes. Skehan (1998) defined a task as “an activity in which meaning is primary, there is a problem to solve and the relationship to real-world activities, with an objective that can be assessed in terms of an outcome” (p. 95). The CLBs are similarly focused around the completion of authentic tasks that are measured by outcomes, making the use of a Communicative and/or Task-based instructional approach logical.

The acquisition of second or subsequent languages is generally accepted to be more challenging for adults than children (Schmid, 2009). This does not, however, mean that adults cannot achieve full proficiency in a new language. Adults may become proficient users of a new language although it may involve a substantially longer time commitment. The differences between the acquisition of second or subsequent languages for adults and children have been attributed to two possible explanations although evidence has not yet definitively supported either as the singular explanation (Schmid, 2009). Some argue that there is a critical period for second language acquisition that ranges from birth until puberty, with acquisition becoming more difficult following puberty (Schmid, 2009). Another argument is that acquisition of second or subsequent language is influenced by differences in cognitive processing, with the assumption that different forms of memory are utilized by first and second language learners resulting in different proficiency outcomes (Paradis, 2004; Squire, 1992; Ullman, 2001). Individual differences have also been linked to second language acquisition, although their influence has experienced a fair amount of skepticism on the grounds of being ill-defined by researchers (Ellis, 2008). Therefore, the differences between adults and children are clear even though the reasons behind the differences have not been definitively explained:

It would be a mistake for people to think that learners will acquire the language the way children acquire their L1 [first language]. Second language learners need coaching and explicit instruction in order to appropriate the fundamental skills of L2 [second language]. (Turuk, 2008, p. 257)

Data regarding individual differences may provide insight into learners; however, the relevance of such information on instruction designed for adults remains unclear.

### **Developmental Process of Reading**

Most individuals (70% to 80%) learn to read without difficulty in early childhood and continue to build their reading skills and vocabulary into adulthood (Shaywitz, 2003). Some individuals, however, experience difficulties when learning to read and if left unchecked these difficulties persist into adulthood, affecting individuals' basic literacy abilities. Individuals' literacy skills can have profound economic, social, academic, and health effects on the quality of their lives (Statistics Canada, 2003). According to UNESCO research (UNESCO-ECLAC, 2010), literacy equals the satisfaction of basic needs:

These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities to live and work with dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. (UNESCO, 2006, as cited in UNESCO-ECLAC, 2010, p. 18-19)

Generally, individuals with less proficient literacy skills have fewer academic and employment opportunities, which translate into a lower income and standard of living. The quality of life and general health of these individuals is also profoundly affected by a lack of proficiency in basic literacy skills (Campbell & Gagnon, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2003). Literacy instruction also carries benefits to health, political involvement, self-

esteem, autonomy, critical thinking, creativity, and social integration (UNESCO-ECLAC, 2010). These benefits are of particular importance to newcomers to Canada, as they have a direct impact on individuals' abilities to adapt and flourish in a new country.

### **Reading as a Skill**

The act of reading is quite unique in that it is a language skill that must be acquired through explicit effort, "reading is an acquired act an invention of man [sic] that must be learned at a conscious level. And it is the very naturalness of speaking that makes reading so hard" (Shaywitz, 2003, pp. 49-50). Unlike the ability to speak, which occurs naturally without explicit effort (Catts & Kamhi, 2005; Gleitman & Rozin, 1977), reading must be consciously learned:

It should be clear that although there is considerable overlap in the processes involved in spoken and written language, there are also many important differences between the two. The differences explain to a large extent why learning to read is not a simple derivative of learning to talk and understand. (Catts & Kamhi, 2005, p. 22)

In fact, reading is a recent and uniquely human accomplishment (Shaywitz, 2003). The connections in the human brain do not contain a localized reading area:

In order to read, man [sic] has to take advantage of what nature has provided: a biological module for language ... the reader must somehow convert the print on a page into a linguistic code—the phonetic code, the only code recognized and accepted by the language system. (Shaywitz, 2003, p. 50)

Shaywitz explained that unless the printed letters can be converted into a phonetic code, they will remain deficient of any linguistic meaning.

Catts and Kamhi (2005) identified three major differences between spoken and written language. The first and second differences echo Shaywitz's (2003) foundational assumptions that reading requires explicit input, demonstrating that language consists of units of sound, or phonemes, which correspond to graphemes to create meaning, and that reading is a relatively new ability for humans. Catts and Kamhi's third difference relates to the prevalence of reading as a means of communication and the intrinsic value of reading by different cultures worldwide. They cite Stubbs (1980), who claimed that, "more than 40% of the world's adult population cannot read or write at all, and an additional 25% do not have sufficient mastery of a writing system for it to be of significant practical use" (as cited in Catts & Kamhi, p. 17). Thus, if literacy has little cultural value within a specific culture, it is unlikely to be acquired by the members of that culture. This point is critical to understanding the background and abilities of immigrant and refugee populations settling in Canada. In Canada, literacy is not only assumed, but is essential for creating a stable and productive life (Statistics Canada–OECD, 2005). Literacy may also have a connection to socioeconomic status whereby individuals' socioeconomic status limits their access to education, possibly leading to insufficient literacy skills (Freire, 1985; 1993). For some, the amount of schooling completed may be the result of other factors including war, famine, poverty, and displacement:

Studies agree that illiteracy results from the simultaneous interaction of a number of factors. Chief among these are poverty, malnutrition, health problems, child labour, migration, and lack of access to continuous teaching and learning environments. These inequalities influence the social vulnerability of individuals,



and vary significantly depending on gender, age, ethnicity and geographic location.

(UNESCO-ECLAC, 2010, p. 35)

With these factors in mind, it is crucial to devise instruction that focuses on individuals rather than skills only:

Adult literacy programs should not be confined to teaching specific literacy skills but rather should contextualize instruction within a framework of social activism and societal transformation. Critical adult literacy programs should be designed around backgrounds, needs, and interests of students and should encourage a “dialogic” relationship between teachers and students. (Degener, 2001, p. 27)

Thus, instruction in literacy skills alone is not enough. Students must also have instruction that is meaningful to their individual backgrounds and needs but also consistent with a critical view toward change and improvement within the community.

Reading can be described as consisting of two crucial components: decoding and comprehension (Catts & Kamhi, 2005; Chall, 1983; Downing, 1979; Share, 1995; Share & Stanovich, 1995; Shaywitz, 2003; Stahl, 2006; Stanovich, 1991). Decoding refers to the ability to break down words into their phonemic parts and to identify words accurately. Comprehension refers to the ability to derive meaning from a word. For those who experience reading difficulties, the difficulties can be broken down into either a weakness in the ability to decode words or a weakness in reading comprehension. An inability to decode quickly and automatically will affect a reader’s ability to attend to the meaning of a text ultimately affecting comprehension (Shaywitz, 2003). Also, an inability to decode efficiently causes readers to focus more on contextual cues: “poor readers who have difficulty accurately decoding words must rely more on contextual

information than good readers who have proficient word recognition skills” (Catts & Kamhi, 2005, p. 22). Thus, poor decoding skills affect comprehension and make it difficult for readers to understand what has been read.

### **Reading Development in Childhood**

For the majority of people in developed countries, reading development begins in childhood. Downing (1979) and Chall (1983) have proposed tri-part stage models of initial reading development in childhood. The first stage was referred to by Downey as the cognitive phase, but it is also more commonly referred to as the period of emergent literacy. In this stage, children gain general knowledge of their language, familiarity with print, and information about the reading process. In the second (or mastery) stage, children learn to decode words accurately. This involves making connections between the phonemes and graphemes of the language to create a code that can be used to decode an infinite number of words. The final stage, or automatic stage, involves using decoding skills fluently and automatically to achieve fluent reading skills, “at this point, children begin to develop automatic word recognition skills so that the process of recognizing words is transparent and the reader can concentrate fully on the text” (Stahl, 2006, p. 52). From this point onwards, decoding becomes rapid and automatic, or even subconscious until the reader is faced with a new word that he/she has never previously encountered.

The stage theories of reading development have been criticized on several grounds (Catts & Kamhi, 2005; Share & Stanovich, 1995). For instance, Catts and Kamhi (2005) believed that the stage theory focused on the knowledge acquired by a reader as opposed to the mechanisms that facilitate reading at each stage. Second, each of the stages centred on a single type of reading with little description surrounding the

development within the stage. Finally, they believed that this model oversimplified the process of reading development and did not concede that individual differences could alter the development of an individual reader. Catts and Kamhi also comment that there is no singular path to becoming a fluent reader, with those who follow divergent paths also becoming capable readers.

In an alternative model, Stanovich (1991) highlighted a dual-route approach to word recognition. In this model, there was a direct and indirect route to decoding and recognizing words. The direct approach, or whole-word approach, relied on readers focusing on the visual representation of an unknown word, which is then recognized as a unit. The indirect approach required readers to possess explicit knowledge of phonological systems and use phonological representations when decoding unknown words. Stanovich further stated that the end goal of reading is word recognition. As a reader became more proficient, decoding became less important. Automatic and fluent reading no longer relied on the process of decoding and instead depended on the direct visual route to word recognition, “orthographic knowledge accumulates as readers phonologically decode different words that share similar letter sequences, recognize these similarities, and store this information in memory. Phonological decoding is, thus, necessary to become proficient at orthographic reading” (Catts & Kamhi, 2005, p. 35). The dual-route model acknowledged that individual differences occur because of differences in individual backgrounds that can include high exposure or low exposure to print prior to reading instruction.

A further alternative to the stage models was the self-teaching hypothesis presented by Share (1995) and Share and Stanovich (1995). In this model, phonological

decoding operated as a self-teaching mechanism allowing children to become automatic readers by providing opportunities for reading. This model is based on four separate elements. First, decoding is item-based rather than stage dependent. Second, children do not need to have fully developed phonological systems before beginning with decoding, implying that reading instruction should begin early. Third, although phonological knowledge supports the development of word recognition, it will not lead to proficient reading alone. Phonological knowledge supports the increasing lexicalization through print exposure. Finally, a relationship exists between the primary importance of phonological components and the secondary importance of orthographic components. Within this model, success depends on a child's exposure to print, with special emphasis on the frequency of this exposure. Writing may also play a role as it connects the phonologic, orthographic, spoken, and written conventions of language.

Although there is no collective agreement about how reading develops in childhood, there is however acknowledgement that decoding and comprehension are the central aspects of reading. The developmental approach to reading in childhood, however, offers an explanation of typical reading experiences, "the factors that contribute to normal reading development can also provide a useful road map for considering the possible causes of reading problems and describing the specific problems children with reading disabilities experience" (Catts & Kamhi, 2005, p. 47). This approach can also be used to inform the definition, identification, and classification of children with reading difficulties.

## **Reading Development in Adulthood**

Evidence-based research completed on the reading development in children is extensive in contrast to the small body of research conducted in the area of adult basic education. Adult basic education is an umbrella term used to describe instruction for learners who are 16 years of age or older and not participating in secondary education programs (Kruidenier, 2002). This group encompasses individuals with literacy needs and may also include speakers of English as a Second Language participating in general programs (i.e., those that are not specifically designated as English as a Second Language).

Adult literacy instruction is markedly different from elementary and secondary school-based instruction in several ways. For instance, adult basic education is not mandatory, daily attendance is variable, learners need to invest considerable commitment and time, and they bring highly varied interests, strengths, and weaknesses to the classroom. In their systematic review of the literature, the Reading Research Working Group (RRWG) compiled a set of principles for adult basic education as well as a set of criteria for adapting existing research on school-aged students to the adult context (Kruidenier, 2002). The RRWG study included the following topics: reading assessment, computer technology, program goals, setting, and instructional methods, intensity, and duration of instruction, learning disabilities, reading levels, learner motivation, and the participants' first language. The work of the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) served as a methodological basis for evaluating the efficacy of reading research done on both adults and children,

K-12 reading research to adult reading instruction. These criteria take into account the existing ABE research, the important differences between children and adults, and the strengths and weaknesses of K-12 research in each of the topic areas. NRP findings were used to help fill gaps in the ABE reading instruction research, to provide support when K-12 and ABE research were incompatible, or to signal caution when they were contradictory. (Kruidenier, 2002, p. 2)

The RRWG identified four components, which were consistent with the NRP, as essential to reading. The components included alphabetic knowledge (phonemic awareness and decoding), fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The RRWG also elaborated on 17 principles upon which to base adult instruction that are encompassed within each of the four components. These principles are synthesized below.

A general summary of the 17 principles resulting from the RRWG analysis of the four central components (Kruidenier, 2002) illustrated the main findings of the group. In assessment procedures, one assessment is usually inadequate for detecting ability in all four components in reading. Therefore, assessment of the individual components of reading was recommended. Many adult nonreaders possessed only very limited or no phonemic awareness ability. Like children, they would have difficulties manipulating phonemes. Adults who had challenges decoding new words, however, were usually better able to recognize sight words than children. By participating in an adult basic education program, adults may improve their decoding skills. Instruction in phonemic awareness and decoding may also improve all components of reading. Instruction in decoding should be explicit and combined with instruction in the other components of reading. According to Kruidenier (2002), fluency in adult beginning readers was found

to be quite similar to that of younger readers. Also, fluency could be taught to adult beginning readers and may improve other components of reading.

In addition to the 17 principles, the RRWG identified 32 trends (Kruidenier, 2002). Briefly, adult, beginning readers behaved similarly to children who possessed minimum phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness could be acquired by adults later in life, with these adults demonstrating comparable phonemic awareness abilities to adults who had learned to read in childhood. Adults with learning disabilities often demonstrated persistent phonemic awareness difficulties (Kruidenier, 2002). By participating in an adult basic education class, adults may have been able to improve phonemic awareness. It also may have been possible to improve phonemic awareness in a family literacy setting. For adult intermediate readers (i.e., readers with limited reading ability), decoding may not have been improved by the use of a meaning-based diagnostic-prescriptive approach. Finally, adult, beginning readers may not have been familiar with the structure of written English and may have been unaware of effective comprehension strategies. They did, however, understand the role of motivation, personal interest and prior knowledge on reading success (Kruidenier).

Building on the work of Kruidenier (2002), McShane (2005) further disseminated the evidence-based research for adult basic education and literacy practitioners. McShane's work echoed many of the findings of the RRWG and the National Reading Panel (2000). She identified the same essential components of reading, although she divided phonemic awareness and decoding into separate components: phonemic awareness (alphabetic), decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. She also proposed five forms of instruction to serve these essential components: phonemic

awareness instruction, phonics instruction, fluency development, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies instruction. Phonemic awareness training and decoding instruction referred to the ability to break down words and discover the meaning through individual phonemes. Fluency development referred to the ability to read rapidly, with little effort spent on decoding. Vocabulary instruction increased the contextual knowledge of a learner and provided extended world knowledge. Comprehension strategies provided the reader with ability to become more self-directed and able to complete independent reading.

Consistent with Kruidenier (2002), McShane (2005) argued that these components are not sequential, but rather simultaneously reinforce each other. She also offered another orientation to these five reading components. Phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency can be considered print skills while vocabulary and comprehension are meaning-based skills. Similar to the RRWG (Kruidenier, 2002), McShane also advocated for an assessment of each component separately and argued that general assessments typically do not provide a holistic perspective of learners' strengths and weaknesses:

no single measure can provide a complete picture of adults' abilities in reading or any of the reading components. A test is just a sample of performance. And of course, you are only human, and your interpretations are not 100% accurate. (p. 29).

Referring to the research of the RRWG, McShane stated that research on reading instruction for children is compatible with adult research so long as it is carefully modified to address the needs of adult learners.



McShane (2005) acknowledged many of the everyday realities of adult education that make reading instruction challenging for both the instructors and the learners. Multilevel classrooms were a commonplace occurrence and could be significant barriers to progress (Beder & Medina, 2001; Kruidenier, 2002; McShane, 2005). Adults tended to have erratic attendance due to multiple responsibilities associated with work and family. McShane noted that English language learners often struggled with fluency and comprehension due to their limited English vocabularies. If classes also included English language learners, another layer was added to an already challenging classroom scenario.

In order to mitigate these challenges, McShane (2005) discussed the idea of “learner awareness.” This concept involves learning about the strengths and needs of learners, sharing these results in a sensitive manner, respecting learners’ confidentiality, and collaborating with learners to co-create the instruction. Learner-centred instruction recognized that individual learner profiles were unique with respect to their previous educational experiences and reading habits, with these experiences being relevant to instructional design. The instructional goals should relate to the individual goals of learners, necessitating communication about goals between instructors and learners. As many adults had limited time to devote to adult basic education, it was necessary to prepare them to be self-directed so that they were able to continue their studies independently outside of the classroom, “with that knowledge in mind, and understanding that life complications make it likely that many of the adults in your class today will not attend long enough to reach their goals, you may want to think about ways to facilitate self-study” (McShane, p. 20). Thus, instruction was not limited to what occurs in the

classroom. Instructors had to also consider how to aid student success outside of the classroom.

McShane (2005) outlined five features of effective instruction that were similar to those proposed by the NRP (2000). The first feature stipulated that explicit instruction was necessary for all classroom goals, objectives, and content accompanied by extensive modeling by the instructor. Learners needed to understand the purpose behind everything happening within the classroom through explicit explanation by the instructor, which was reinforced by instructor modelling. The second feature stated that strategy instruction provided learners with an understanding of how to learn. Once again, modelling was important to ensuring that learners grasped the strategies. The third feature stated that learners needed to be supported while they learn, with this support being gradually withdrawn as the learners became more proficient and self-directed. The fourth called for intensive instruction that combined active learning with extra time provided for mastery of a task. The final feature divided instruction into manageable segments that can be presented in a systematic sequence. McShane reiterated that reading acquisition is not a linear process and that adults present highly varied profiles. Accordingly, it was logical to provide instruction on all of the components of reading simultaneously. There are many similarities between these four features that allow them to work with one another and also allow for the accommodation of individual differences that occur within particular components.

In addition to these features, McShane (2005) described the ordering of skills established by the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center (1999) and Swanson (1999). The order could be used with any of the feature strategies previously

outlined by McShane. The sequence began with the introduction of a skill or strategy accompanied by an explicit explanation of its purpose. This was followed up by an explicit explanation of the skill or strategy and modelling by the instructor. The instructor then provided the learner with an opportunity to use the skills or strategy through guided practice, which was supported by instructor feedback. The final part of the sequence was the independent practice of the skills or strategy by the learner. This sequence was repeated often to ensure mastery of the skill or strategy.

### **Reading Instruction for Adult English Language Learners**

Just as adults have different needs than children, adult English language learners have very different needs than those of native speakers of English. Adult English language learners have the added challenge of acquiring literacy skills while being immersed in an English environment where they are required to read in English rather than in their native language. Some English language learners participate in classes specifically for English as a second language while others participate in adult basic education classes intended for native speakers. The number of English language learners is steadily increasing because of increased immigration, “the increase in English language learners has been accompanied by an increase in adults with limited literacy in English” (Burt et al, 2003, p. 4).

CIC census data confirm that the number of permanent residents in Canada with less than 9 years of education has doubled from 3,703 in 1999 to 6,702 in 2008 (Statistics Canada, 2008). Furthermore, these increases are across various categories of immigrants including economic immigrants and refugees. In 2008, 14.6% of all

permanent residents possessed less than nine years of schooling and 15.8% possessed 10 to 12 years of education (see figure 5). Immigrants with limited prior schooling have a great deal of variation within their first language literacy skills, resulting in diverse literacy needs. For instance, some may have not had access to literacy instruction or come from countries where spoken languages are not written (Burt et al., 2003).

UNESCO-ECLAC (2010) researchers have made the connection between the number of years of school and literacy level, “the level of illiteracy depends on an individual’s years of schooling, the types of information to which he or she has had access and the degree to which specific communication codes have been mastered” (p. 30). UNESCO-ECLAC’s study confirms findings from Infante (2000) who found that seven years were required for learners to develop basic skills, but that at least 12 years were required for learners to acquire strong skills in all areas. Thus, newcomers to Canada with fewer years of schooling are likely to have literacy needs that will require substantive attention.

In their review of the research, Burt et al. (2003) outlined a list of factors that required thoughtful consideration when working with English language learners. This list included age, motivation to read, the home, work, and educational environment, the sociocultural and socioeconomic background, and the learners’ abilities (and/or disabilities). A shorter list of factors have received more immediate attention in the literature and were the focus of Burt et al.’s (2003) review. These factors included: (a) first-language literacy level, (b) oral proficiency in English, (c) educational background,

Level of Education	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
0 to 9 yrs schooling	15.3	15.0	14.6	15.1	15.0	13.7	14.1	15.9	16.0	<b>14.6</b>
10-12 yrs schooling	18.9	17.9	16.9	16.7	16.9	16.3	16.2	17.2	16.9	<b>15.8</b>
13 + yrs schooling	8.5	8.9	8.8	8.7	9.1	8.6	8.3	8.0	7.7	7.2
Trade Certificate	7.6	5.5	4.8	4.3	4.5	5.0	4.7	5.0	5.4	5.6
Non-university diploma	9.1	8.6	9.4	9.2	9.9	10.7	10.9	11.2	11.1	12.0
Bachelor's degree	29.8	32.3	34.2	34.1	33.6	32.3	31.5	28.8	28.9	29.8
Master's degree	8.9	9.8	9.6	10.1	9.5	11.3	12.3	11.8	11.8	12.7
Doctorate degree	2.0	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.6	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.4

*Figure 5.* Percentages for levels of education of permanent residents aged 15 years or older, 1999-2008.

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2009). *Facts and figures 2008:*

*Immigration overview permanent and temporary residents.* Ottawa, ON: Author.

(d) goals for learning English, and finally (e) transfer between learners' first language and English.

Robson (1982) and Strucker (2002) found that learners' first languages can influence the acquisition of reading skills and that it is important to establish the level of first language literacy. Huntley (1992) proposed a classification system that divided English language learners according to their literacy needs. This classification system included: pre-literate, non-literate, semi-literate, and non-Roman alphabet literate. Pre-literate learners come from a cultural background where no written language exists and whose progress will be much slower than other literacy learners. Non-literate learners have no exposure to education or literacy, which is often the result of socioeconomic circumstances. Non-literate learners may be hesitant to reveal their "lack of literacy" to instructors or assessors. Semi-literate learners have had some exposure to education and literacy. However, these learners have not acquired sufficient skill to be considered proficient readers. This may also be the result of socioeconomic or educational factors. Finally, the non-Roman alphabet learners are literate in their first language, which uses a non-Roman alphabet, such as Cyrillic or Thai. For Huntley, this group also includes learners who use a logographic language such as Chinese or Japanese.

This classification was expanded by Birch (2002) and by Strucker (2002) to include non-alphabet literate and Roman-alphabet literate. In Birch and Strucker's classification, non-alphabet literate separates learners literate in a logographic language from learners fluent in a non-Roman alphabet. For Roman-alphabet literate learners, differences at the phonemic level may create reading challenges as the letter-phoneme correspondences in English are more varied than many other languages, "in fact, all

English language learners, regardless of the type of L1 [first language] literacy in their background, need direct instruction in the English symbol system and English sound-symbol correspondences” (Strucker, 2002 as cited in Burt et al. 2003, p. 12). More positively, although learners may have literacy needs, they may have a strong oral proficiency in English and may also have had positive previous literacy experiences. Thus, oral proficiency in English and first language literacy should be used to place learners into the appropriate class.

Grabe and Stoller (2002) asserted that first language literacy affects the transfer of reading skills between the first and second language, making it essential for instructors to establish learners’ levels of first language literacy before beginning instruction. Hilferty (1996) analyzed the role of decoding in overall comprehension in 42 adult Latinos and found that only 15% of overall reading comprehension related to decoding skills. She stated that decoding and comprehension have a reciprocal relationship that should be fostered, and that all English language learners should receive instruction in decoding regardless of their first language. Comprehension, however, requires more than an ability to decode words. Grabe and Stoller stressed the importance of metacognitive knowledge and knowledge of reading strategies, stating that positive language transfer from the first language to the second language can only occur when the learner has metacognitive awareness of the first language. They cautioned against assumptions about what knowledge would be transferred from the first to the second language, stressing that instruction in reading strategies needed to be direct and explicit to ensure transfer.

Grabe and Stoller (2002) also claimed that educational background is important in determining reading proficiency. Learners bring their first language learning experiences

and expectations in the second language learning setting. If learners have had no previous educational experiences, a classroom will be completely unfamiliar to them. For those learners with some previous learning experience, their previous experience was relevant and could be a comfort to them. While the educational experiences of highly educated learners are extensive, the approach used in North American English-as-a-second language instructional settings could be markedly different from the previous experiences. Instructors need to understand the needs and goals of learners in order to provide effective instruction. In studies conducted by Alderson (1984), Carrell (1991), and Tan, Moore, Dixon, and Nicholson (1994), proficiency in English was a better indicator of reading ability than educational background in learners with a low oral proficiency. They found that vocabulary knowledge and syntactic proficiency were particularly good indicators. Syntactic knowledge includes sentence level information and grammatical information about language.

The findings of Alderson (1984), Carrell (1991), and Tan et al. (1994) that vocabulary knowledge and syntactic proficiency were good indicators of reading ability are consistent with the findings in research on children that connected vocabulary with reading comprehension (McShane, 2005). However, vocabulary had a more profound effect on English language learners as they typically had a more limited vocabulary. Grabe and Stoller (2002) have estimated that a learner needs to know 3,000 words to read independently in a second language. This could become problematic and slow down the reading process to what Coady (1997) referred to as the learner's paradox. In a second language, learners need vocabulary to read, but they also need to read to learn vocabulary. To this end, learners' goals become important. By addressing learners'



goals, instructors were better able to meet the needs of learners and use materials that were appropriate and effective in content related to learners' goals.

Burt et al. (2003) reviewed the various models available for reading instruction, observing that none of these models were specific to adult English language learners. The first model was referred to as the "bottom-up" approach. Here, meaning originated with the smallest units of language (i.e., letters and sounds), and then moved to words and phrases. Decoding was the key to this approach. In the second model, called the "top-down" approach, readers used background knowledge and inferences to establish meaning. In the third model, known as the "interactive approach," readers used a combination of both bottom-up and top-down approaches. Burt and his colleagues suggested that literate learners also may possess internal models that internalize previous learning experiences which could affect reading behaviours and abilities.

According to the research on the acquisition of reading, four components were identified as being essential to reading. The first of these components was phonological processing, also referred to as decoding. The second component was vocabulary recognition. McLeod and McLaughlin (1986) found that quick word recognition led to better comprehension at the sentence or paragraph level which ultimately allowed for more fluent reading comprehension. Research by Tan et al. (1994) and by Coady, Mgoto, Hubbard, Graney, and Mokhtari (1993) demonstrated that for second language learners, reading comprehension increased through accurate and rapid word recognition. Furthermore, reading instruction needed to deal with the topic of vocabulary recognition to train second language learners. The third component was syntactic processing which included information about grammatical decoding. The final component was schema

activation which referred to activating relevant background knowledge to infer meaning from words.

Similar to the dual-route method proposed by Stanovich (1991), Burt et al. (2003) stated that phonological and orthographic knowledge should be taught directly to improve reading acquisition. Earlier, Joe (1998) and Krashen and Terrell (1983) stated that comprehensible input could positively reinforce reading instruction through regular access to language that was understandable to the learner but higher than what a learner would be able to produce at that point. This is based on Krashen's (1982) hypothesis that the learner's current ability is equivalent to their comprehensible input or 'i'; that is, what a learner can understand unassisted. The level of instruction should ideally be 'i' plus 1, meaning that instruction is slightly beyond what a learner could achieve unassisted.

In a discussion paper created by the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL, 2000), key factors related to adult English language learners were discussed. They stated that adult English language learners are immigrant, refugees, and migrants and that each of them possess different learning strengths and needs. The factors which were identified as critical to these learners included: (a) spoken language or languages, (b) country of origin, (c) language used in previous schooling, and (d) first and second language written literacy levels. These factors, along with external factors such as war, famine, and natural disasters provided valuable information about individual learners that could assist in providing effective instruction and assessment (Jangles Productions, 2006).

Wrigley, Chen, White, and Soroui (2009) concurred with the conclusion that there was a strong correlation between learners' proficiency in English and years of education.

They also argued that oral language proficiency and prior schooling provide a wider range of opportunities especially economic ones: “literacy is a critical determinant of economic success not just for people who spoke a language other than English growing up but for native speakers as well” (p. 14). Learners with poor literacy skills and little education are doubly disadvantaged; “adults who have only a few years of schooling are likely to struggle with literacy in any language, and acquiring literacy in a new language can be challenging” (p. 20).

Condelli, Wrigley, and Yoon (2008) reported that typical classroom practices being used in English as a second language classes may also be detrimental to English language literacy learners, “this group is unlikely to succeed in conventional ESL classes where some degree of literacy in the native language is assumed” (p. 132). Learners with low literacy skills may not be the only group who were disadvantaged in such classrooms. Wrigley (2008) stated that the “one-size-fits-all” approach of these programs placed those with low literacy skills and well-educated learners into the same classrooms and that this approach did not serve the needs of either group well. However, she stated that those at greatest disadvantage in this situation were learners with low literacy skills. She went on to say that asking people to learn a language and to learn to read at the same time was inappropriate. Providing literacy instruction in the first language could help to mitigate this problem. As many learners progress in the acquisition of second language with little difficulty while others struggle experience great difficulties, Wrigley believed that positive transfer from the first to the second language occurred and led her to claim that learners only learn to read once. That is, once the ability to read has been gained in any language, the skills can be applied to subsequent languages. Wrigley advocated for

the assessment of learners' first and second language literacy, functional literacy, and environmental print as well as the separation of oral assessments from reading and writing assessments. Wrigley believed that such assessment would create an accurate representation of learners' needs and abilities and facilitate the development of instruction that matched to learners' goals.

Research completed for the National Adult Literacy Database (Millar, 2007) confirmed that learners with low literacy skills simply did not have the skills necessary to manage in English-as-a-second-language classrooms. Also, many of these learners left language and literacy classes before they had mastered the language adequately, "considering that even under the best condition, it takes people from two to seven years to develop fluency in second language skills" (Klassen & Burnaby, 1993, p. 380). Access to language classes could also present a challenge for some learners as it has been estimated that less than 50% of newcomers are able to access federally funded services (CIC, 1994, p. 19). Access to LINC classes is restricted by a number of factors that are beyond the control of LINC clients, such as waitlists, restricted class sizes, transportation, and child-minding services. In some cases, multiple factors may simultaneously prevent potential LINC clients from accessing LINC classes (Jangles Productions, 2006). In addition to difficulties with access, the language training program in Canada have been previously described by Burnaby (1989) as "chaotic and wasteful of human and monetary resources: those of the governments, the deliverers and the learners" (p. iii). In her review of nontraditional programs (or those educational programs provided in classrooms with paid professional teachers who are trained in second language teaching), she identified marginalized groups: "this focus on certain groups of immigrants with special

language learning needs has been included here not as an arbitrary organizing principle for the discussion but to emphasize real areas of problems within the official language training delivery system” (p. 5).

Specifically, Burnaby (1989) found that four groups were most at risk. The first group consisted of those with restricted access to classes (e.g., limited child-care, limited transportation). The second group consisted of underemployed and educated immigrants. The third group were those living in remote locations where classes were not available, and the final group were newcomers with low levels of education and literacy in their first language. Burnaby identified this latter group as having “special needs.” She also qualified that, although these learners may have had no or little formal education, they may still possess a wide range of oral proficiencies. Some learners, like the underemployed, may only require academic upgrading. Most language training programs in North America assumed that clients possess literacy in either English or French as well as cultural knowledge. However, even those adults with previous education may have had experiences that are very different from Canadian norms. To this end, Burnaby recommended teaching literacy in the learners’ first languages at the same time as the second language.

The Canadian Multilingual Literacy Centre (as cited in Bogdan, 1995), similar to Burnaby (1989) and Wrigley (2008), also shared the view that first language literacy should be taught simultaneously with the second language. A learner-centred, holistic, skills-oriented and nondiscriminatory model was proposed to assist learners with less than 9 years of education. The goal of this model is to bring learners to full literacy in their first language: “it is now acknowledged, however, that immigrants with low level or

non-existent literacy skills in their own language encounter major difficulties when they enter a unilingual classroom” (Bogdan, p. 8). Research using this model was conducted with a group Spanish speaking immigrants in Toronto, and it was found that by bridging the first and second language, the amount of time required to learn a second language can be reduced (Bogdan, 1995). As part of this approach, learners were oriented to similarities between their first and second languages, with learning strategies in life skills and social skills incorporated into the instruction. Bogdan also outlined a number of factors that could impact the progress of learners including age, attendance, health, motivation, work, family responsibility, educational attainment, and country of origin. Class attendance was seen to be the most influential as it was influenced by many of the other factors simultaneously. The Canadian Multilingual Literacy Centre also reported that low literacy was connected to problems with settlement and integration, the poorer health among these learners, and could ultimately create a cycle of poverty. Degener (2001) discussed the perspective of critical theory toward the use of learners’ first language in subsequent language instruction:

critical educators should use students’ own languages as a starting point for educational development (Freire, 1998). Educators should become familiar with the communicative practices associated with the written and oral forms of their student’s languages. Every effort should be made to learn about the grammar and syntax of students’ languages and to understand how different cultural practices may influence language usage—for example, with regard to how students address or interact with others or how students may tell a story. (p. 39)

Thus, it is not only learners' first language that is important, but also self-expression. Once again, the focus is not simply on skills but on communication and expressions.

According to the Ontario Literacy Coalition (2007) there was no distinction between low literate immigrants and refugees in the literature. The coalition also reported that low levels of first language literacy compounded second-language learning. However, the coalition also cautioned that there was insufficient evidence-based or empirical support for the notion that instruction in the first language should occur prior to second-language instruction.

Verma (2004), former president of TESL Ontario, a professional governing body for English as a second language teachers, stated that English as a second language classes for literacy learners needed to be kept separate from the mainstream adult English as a second language, including LINC classes, which are free for Permanent Residents (formerly referred to as Landed Immigrants) and Convention Refugees, and adult basic education classes but which have a focus on language instruction and not on literacy and basic skills development. She stated the need for greater recognition and more research and training in the area of English as a second language.

Many English-as-a-second-language learners with literacy needs were placed into regular level LINC classes. Furthermore, individuals "fell through the cracks" due to LINC eligibility requirements and instructional time limits. LINC classes are restricted to Permanent Residents (formerly referred to as Landed Immigrants) and Convention Refugees who are limited to a maximum of three years of study, which is highly problematic based on the results from the CCLB (2005) and CIC (2009). According to the CCLB's results, clients will require more than six months to progress to the next

benchmark. CIC found that completing times depended on the immigration status category to which the client belonged, with family class and refugee class clients requiring an additional 70-80 extra hours to complete a level. The national average for level completion was 384 hours, which was lower than the average of 395 for Ontario.

Jangles Productions (2006) found similar issues with the LINC program, stating that most immigrants and refugees with literacy needs attended regular classes, meaning those not designated as literacy level, LINC classes. In addition, they found that multilevel classes were problematic with 70% of English-as-a-second-language literacy level classes mixed with mainstream non-literacy-based classes. Mainstream classes tend to be larger and do not focus on developing literacy skills. Furthermore, mixed-level classes may include several LINC levels, meaning that disparities between individual students could be quite profound. Another issue was the placement of educated learners with literacy needs together with learners with a low speaking proficiency but without literacy needs. These groups had very different needs and should be placed into separate classes. Learners with literacy needs required more time to grasp the material presented in classes. Jangles Productions proposed that using a case management approach would be more effective. They also stated that the definition of literacy needs to be clarified and to include all learners with literacy needs as well as expanding the existing literacy benchmarks within the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs), which are used for assessment in LINC programs. Finally, more training in the area of literacy within English as a second language and ongoing professional development to support teachers working in this area was needed.



Thus, the evidence stressed the need to consider learners' proficiencies in both first and second language and literacy while considering other aspects of learners' backgrounds including prior education, needs, and goals. When all of this information is collected and combined, profiles could be created that more accurately reflects learners' strengths and weaknesses. Learners with low literacy skills clearly have very different needs than learners with full literacy skills that require accommodations that do not fit into conventional English-as-a-second-language classrooms. Smaller classes that provide longer periods of scaffolded, strategic instruction and use of authentic materials appear to be essential for these learners.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of LINC instructors regarding reading instruction and reading difficulties among learners in LINC Level classes 1-3. Through interview data collected from several LINC instructors, a deeper understanding of the nature of reading instruction provided within the LINC program was obtained as well as an understanding of the needs of those learners who experience reading difficulties and are unable to progress through the program in a timely manner. This study provided recommendations about how reading instruction might be improved for these particular clients. The research questions that formed the basis for this research study were threefold. First, the research attempted to determine the instructors' perceptions about why some clients do not progress through the LINC reading levels as expected. Second, the research addressed how the instructors' knowledge of the previous educational and life experiences of LINC clients in LINC Level 1-3 classes related to their experiences within the LINC program and contributed to progress that is slower

than expected. Finally, instructors' understandings of learners' previous experiences were examined with respect to gaining insights about their influence on clients' progress in LINC program.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the context and need for research in the area of reading instruction and reading difficulties for clients in LINC Levels 1 to 3 was established. The literature review explored several different areas, including adult education, reading acquisition and instruction, second language acquisition, and psychology. As participants in LINC classes are adults, the instructional framework of adult education was included as well as second language acquisition. There was also a review of the nature of effective reading instruction for adult learners following an examination of the development of language and reading skills in childhood. The fields of adult education, second language acquisition, and reading instruction have not dealt explicitly with the topics of inclusion and social justice. There, an examination of social context of learning, critical theory, and critical pedagogy was also included to provide a critical lens through which to view instructors' perceptions of the experiences and difficulties of LINC students in LINC Level 1 to 3 classes. Finally, Maslow's hierarchy of needs was included to gain a deeper understanding of the unique needs of newcomers, and in particular those who have lived through experiences such as war, famine, dislocation, discrimination, and/or marginalization in their home country or the country in which they resided prior to immigrating to Canada. My objective in this study was to examine reading instruction and the reading difficulties among LINC Level 1 to 3 learners through the eyes of the instructors working with these clients to better understand why some learners struggle to

make progress and to identify any factors (including their previous life and educational experiences) that may impact their progress. I also hoped to learn more about how instructors understood these experiences and adapted their instructional designs, with a view to making recommendations about reading instruction within the LINC program.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

The purpose of this study is to investigate Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) instructors' perceptions regarding reading instruction and reading difficulties among learners in LINC Level classes 1-3. By collecting interview data from the LINC instructors and analyzing their perceptions, it was my intention to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of reading instruction provided in the LINC program, as well as the needs of those learners who experience reading difficulties and are unable to progress through the program in accordance with expected timelines. The Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB, 2005) states that progression from one benchmark to another will require more than six months of full-time instruction. In practice, however, this is not always the reality. Based on my first hand classroom experiences, some learners require more time to achieve these reading benchmarks for a variety of reasons, including reading difficulties, family obligations, attendance problems, or a lack of motivation. This chapter outlines the research methodology, including research design, site, participant selection, data collection tools, and data analysis procedures. It also includes a discussion of the feasibility and credibility of the study as it relates to the assumptions and limitations of the methodology. Finally, ethical considerations related to the completion of this study are discussed.

#### **Research Context**

LINC classes are federally funded English language classes that are free of charge to newcomers to Canada who are 18 years of age or older and who possess either Permanent Resident (formerly referred to as Landed Immigrant) or Convention Refugee status. These classes are intended to provide language instruction in a "settlement

context” (i.e., instruction that is focused on helping newcomers acclimatize to their new community and the services available to them and their families while providing survival English so that they may function in their daily lives, utilizing classroom-based instruction). The classes encompass a range of levels beginning with four literacy levels (the Foundation Phase, Phases I, II, and III) and extending to LINC Level 7. Although the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs), which are the theoretical framework for determining LINC levels, extend, in practice, to CLB Level 12 (see figure 3, p. 42), LINC classes typically cease at LINC Level 7, as this level is acceptable for entrance into most community colleges (CCLB, 2007). Entrance to university requires the completion of standardized tests of English, such as the TOEFL, TOEIC, or IELTS for non-native speakers of English. Universities establish their own standards for admission and decide which English language proficiency tests are acceptable for admission.

For the purposes of this study, I focused exclusively on LINC Levels 1-3, which are the three lowest proficiency classes following the four phases of literacy instruction. It was my contention that, as part of the in-take assessment process completed by officially designated assessors, some learners were assigned to LINC Levels 1 through 3 without possessing essential prerequisite reading skills. In part, this belief reflected the practice of not assessing fully the extent of first language literacy and asking LINC clients to self-identify as having difficulties with reading and first language literacy in general.

In LINC Levels 1 and 2, the required CLB scores are uniform across the four skills. However, beginning with LINC Level 3, the required CLB scores vary across the benchmarks. For example, LINC Level 3 is defined as a speaking score of CLB 4, a

listening score of CLB 4, a reading score of CLB 3, and a writing score of CLB 3 (see figure 1, p. 3). LINC clients rarely present uniform performance scores across the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As a result, clients are often placed according to the lowest benchmark across four skill sets. For example, a client with a listening score of CLB 2, a speaking score of CLB 2, a reading score of 4, and a writing score of 3 would be assigned an overall LINC Level of 2. For some clients, however, the discrepancy between the four skills is quite profound and the decision about the LINC placement is complex. For example, a client with a listening score of CLB 3, a speaking score of CLB 3, a reading score of Pre-benchmark (PB), and a writing score of (PB) could be assigned an overall LINC Level 1. It is important to note here that for listening and speaking, all learners are given a score of at least CLB 1 and can, therefore, not be considered PB in these two skills. In the latter case, assigning a client who demonstrates PB skills in reading and writing to LINC Level 1 creates a number of instructional challenges (e.g., inadequate prerequisite skills, large range of variability across learners). Large classroom sizes (20-25 students) and mixed-ability groupings extend these challenges. To reiterate, it would appear that some clients with low-level reading and writing skills are placed into classrooms that are not designed to provide the instruction that they require to effectively acquire English and function independently in Canadian society.

### **Methodology**

As this researcher sought to investigate the perceptions and experiences of LINC instructors, the stories of instructors formed the basis of the collected data. The stories of the participants' and myself were treated as a case study. A case study (Creswell, 2007)

is a collection of multiple perspectives that illustrate the issue or problem that the researcher wishes to explore. Case study allows for an in-depth analysis of each case, as well as a comparison across cases. Another facet of the case study approach, which fit well with this particular research question, is the clear delineation of an individual case.

Yin (2003) provided the following definition of a case study: “An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). The participants who were recruited represented similar characteristics within a bounded system as defined by Stake (1995). At the time of data collection, two of the participants were teaching at the same site but at different instructional levels. The number of participants who volunteered to participate did not exceed the number of participants required by me, so there was no basis for excluding more than one participant from a single site. This case study approach was also identified as being instrumental in nature, as “it serve[d] the purpose of illuminating a particular issue” (Creswell, 2008, p. 476).

According to Yin (2003), case studies are favoured in contexts where descriptions are created based upon “how” and “why” questions. A researcher must pose good questions leading to a rich dialogue that is free from bias but that furthers a researcher’s presumptions. The researcher must remain open to contrary findings. The interview has two essential functions. First, the interviewer must pursue the line of inquiry, and second, the interviewer must keep asking questions that propel the line of inquiry forward. In order to avoid subjectivity in this case, I employed member checking of the interview data and themes to corroborate my findings. Interview data were also

triangulated by reviewing teaching artifacts, in this case, teaching plans: “the case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence- documents, artifacts, interviews and observations” (p. 8).

Stake (1995) stated that case studies begin and end with issues. These issues, however, cannot be generalized beyond an individual case or the cases of a case study. These issues are by nature connected to political, social, historical, and personal contexts. From these contexts, two kinds of issues arise: etic and emic. Etic issues are raised by the researcher while emic issues are generated by the participants, and as such belong to the cases. Researchers then make interpretations of these issues to arrive at their finding. Researchers must try to avoid bias and create assertions blending both emic and etic issues to create a complete view of the researcher’s and participants’ contexts: “good case study is patient, reflective, willing to see another view of [the case]” (p. 12).

Stake (1995) also described the potentially different roles that researcher might take when conducting research. I, as the research, identified strongly with the role of teacher:

The intention of research is to inform, to sophisticate, to assist the increase of competence and maturity, to socialize, and to liberate. These also are responsibilities of the teacher. ... The teacher is also an advocate, the exemplar of a way to see, the persuader of a road to follow. (pp. 91-92)

This is indicative of my contextualizing experiences as well as my research direction and future intentions as an instructor and researcher. Finally, case studies facilitate the description of participants’ realities in which meaning is co-constructed by the study



participants and researcher, and also the readers of the findings. Stake advocated for creating what he referred to as thick descriptions:

A constructivist view encourages providing readers with good raw material for their own generalizing. The emphasis is on description of things that readers ordinarily pay attention to, particularly places, events and people, not only commonplace description but “thick description,” the interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case. Constructivism helps a case study researcher justify lots of narrative description in the final report. (p. 102)

Reality consists of three separate constructed realities: the external reality, experiential reality, and a blending of external and experiential realities (Stake, 1995). Another way to conceptualize this would be to think of it as stimulus, response, and interpretation of response and stimulus. This can lead to deeper understanding of the participants by creating a context with which to situate them within their individual contexts.

### **Site and Participant Selection**

As the LINC program is a federally funded program for Permanent Residents (formerly referred to as Landed Immigrants) and Convention Refugees, LINC programs exist nationwide. For the purposes of this study, participants were drawn from the pool of instructors throughout Ontario currently practicing in LINC Level 1 to 3 classrooms. The decision to extend the research site across the province versus confining it to a single geographic location was based on two reasons. First, some LINC programs may provide only one or two LINC Level 1 to 3 classes depending on their size and funding mandates. Second, it was my belief that extending the call for participation would enhance the

overall credibility of the study and result in a better understanding of the issues associated with literacy instruction at this level.

Participants were recruited through a call for participants (see Appendix A) posted on the website of the Hamilton-Wentworth and Ontario TESL affiliates. This represented a homogeneous sampling method whereby a subgroup of individuals was recruited based on defining characteristics (Creswell, 2008), in this case, instructors of LINC Level 1 to 3 classes. The Hamilton-Wentworth TESL affiliate is my local affiliate, as well as the city where I have provided LINC instruction for approximately 4 years prior to beginning this study (I did not work as a LINC instructor in this context for the duration of the study). The provincial TESL affiliate was selected because all LINC instructors nationwide are required to maintain TESL Ontario Certification in order to teach within the LINC program (TESL Ontario, 2011a). For this reason, I believed that using the website of the provincial affiliate would reach a wider range of potential participants. As part of the advertisement, potential participants were directed to contact me via phone or email to gain further information about the study or confirm their interest in participating. The locations for data collection were sites that were mutually agreed upon by the participants and me prior to start of data collection. As participants were drawn from all over Ontario, face-to-face communication was not always possible. Where necessary, data collection occurred via telephone, email communications, or online video communication with a program such as Skype. Confidentiality was similarly observed and maintained under these conditions.

Collecting data without face-to-face contact with the participants had several implications. There were some technical difficulties and scheduling challenges

associated with a participant who communicated via Skype. Also, as the client was at home, there were some interruptions occasionally from family members. The participant requested an initial conversation prior to the first interview to establish context and become more familiar with me. At the close of this conversation, she indicated that she felt comfortable with the research process and was prepared to participate in this study. Had we not completed this step, the interview data obtained might have been more guarded.

Criteria for participation required that individuals were currently or had in the past two years provided instruction in the LINC Level 1-3 classes. As LINC programs are not uniform, there was variability with respect to the nature of LINC classes. For example, some LINC providers have only blended-level classes (i.e., multilevel classes) while others have dedicated levels (i.e., a class devoted to a single LINC level). Thus, some of the participants were teaching one or all of the levels specified in the advertisement simultaneously. It was anticipated that participants would represent multiple geographical sites. However, four of the five participants were from one city in Southwestern Ontario and the remaining participant was from another city also in Southwestern Ontario. Despite the geographical range associated with this call for participation, there were certain features that I anticipated would be shared across participants. LINC programs tend to be dominated by women and the study participants included 4 women and 1 man. The majority of instructors were also expected to be White and of European ancestry based on my experiences working in this field. Four of five participants were of White European ancestry with the other participant was an immigrant of East Indian descent.

I intended to recruit between four to six LINC instructors to participate in this study. According to Creswell (2008), the preferred number for a case study is typically between 4 and 5 participants, with the depth of each participant's responses outweighing the breadth of a larger sample size. In addition, I also served as a participant in the study. By participating in this fashion, my beliefs, opinions and experiences, along with any potential subjectivity, were documented and explored. As I have considerable experience working within the LINC program and developed these research questions as a result of challenges encountered in my teaching practice, I chose to include myself as one of the participants in the study. The rationale behind this decision was twofold. First, I have personal experiences that are of direct relevance to the research questions and wished to contribute to the investigation presented here. Second, due to these professional experiences, I possessed subjectivity related to the research questions. In order to reduce the influence of any such subjectivity, I completed the same tasks as the other participants. This allowed my input to be recorded and analyzed, alongside the responses of the other participants and as part of the comparative and contrastive case analysis (White, 2003).

During the semi-structure interviews, I collected narrative accounts of participants' classroom experiences. As someone who has worked extensively in this program and at these levels, it seemed logical to participate in the narrative process and collaborate with the other participants to create a case study. Creswell (2008) stated that, "collaboration in narrative research means that the inquirer actively involves the participant in the inquiry as it unfolds" (p. 522). If as this quote would suggest, I, as the researcher, were already engaged in a collaboration with the participants in the dialogue,

by acting as a participant, I was able to provide my own narrative without allowing my own subjectivity to overtake the narratives of the other participants. I have identified myself in the quotations and figures to differentiate my voice from that of the other participants. As a fellow instructor, I believe I had an excellent understanding of their classroom experiences and could establish a close rapport with the participants. I acted as the first participant in the initial semi-structured interviews with my supervisor acting as the interviewer. I completed the demographic questionnaire and provided this along with a copy of my monthly teaching plan to her prior to the interviews. This procedure was in essence a 'pilot study' where I was able to 'test' the interview protocols and gain experience about interviewing participants (Creswell, 2008). I also used my own field study notes as a basis for reflection with respect to the research questions and my own individual responses as a participant, and as well as my procedural questions as a researcher. During my interviews with the other participants, my field study notes acted as place for reflection and follow-up questions, which informed subsequent interviews and data analysis.

In this study, there were a total of five participants, with myself acting as a participant (hereafter referred to as Kim). Based on my experiences, the gender distribution was not surprising, as women tend to be the predominate gender in this field. The five participants were drawn from LINC Level 1-3 classes. Each of the five participants presented a unique profile. These profiles provided insight from multiple perspectives into the LINC program, reading instruction, and reading difficulties.

### **Participant Profiles**

The first participant, Kim, was teaching a LINC Level 3-5 class at the time of the interviews but had spent three out of four years working with LINC Levels 1-3. In total, she had 11 years of teaching experience, which included work in ESL and test preparation classes, and working as a German instructor. She also held a Bachelor of Education degree in Adult Education and an undergraduate degree in Languages and Linguistics. In addition, she completed graduate level coursework in German Applied Linguistics and was currently pursuing a Master of Education.

The second participant, Jane, was teaching LINC Levels 1-2 at the time of the interviews, with a total of 13.5 years of teaching experience. Her experience included ESL classes, day care centres, nonprofit educational centres for children, tutoring, and work as a docent. Four of her five years in the LINC program have been in LINC Levels 1 to 3. Her undergraduate degree was completed in English.

The third participant, Sam, was teaching two different classes, a LINC Level 1-2 class and a LINC Phase III Literary-Level 1 class. Of her three years in the LINC program, she spent almost 2.5 years at these levels. She had seven years of teaching experience, including time within a local school board and in her native country teaching Science and Family Studies. Her undergraduate degree was a Bachelor of Science with a subsequent Bachelor's degree in Education, leading to a teaching license and Ontario Teaching Certificate.

The fourth participant, Amy, was teaching a LINC Level 3 class at the time of this study. She had spent only one year working in the LINC program and had worked in LINC Level 3 exclusively. The remaining 2.5 years of her teaching experience were

spent working as a teaching assistant and elementary teacher in a French Immersion program. Her undergraduate degree was in English and French and she held a subsequent Bachelor's degree in Education with an Ontario Teaching Certificate and a Master's degree in French.

The final participant, Alex, was teaching a LINC Level 1-2 class at the time of these interviews. His year of teaching experience was limited to the LINC program at this level. His undergraduate degree was in French and Political Science with subsequent Bachelor's degrees in English Literature and French-to-English Translation. He also held a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Technology.

### **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

Data were collected from the participants in the form of semi-structured interviews, copies of monthly teaching plans, and a simple demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D). The data collection process began with the completion of the demographic questionnaire and the first interview. Once participants communicated their willingness to participate in the study and provided informed consent (see Appendix B), they were provided with a copy of the demographic questionnaire and interview protocol (see Appendix C). The time, location, and format of the first meeting (i.e., face-to-face, Skype, phone) was agreed upon by the participants and myself. Each of the interviews lasted for approximately 60-90 minutes and was audio recorded for transcription and data analysis.

The first session began with the completion the demographic questionnaire designed to gather demographic and initial background information about the participants related to their educational and teaching backgrounds (e.g., the subject area of

undergraduate/graduate degrees, years and levels of teaching experience). This information identified some basic similarities and differences between the participants that could be related to the interview responses. The participants were then asked to respond to the first set of interview prompts (see Appendix C). The prompts were used to ask participants to describe their experiences across four general areas: teaching background and experiences, daily instruction and interactions with students, assessment practices, and student variability including their backgrounds and previous learning experiences. These prompts were intended to foster reflection among the participants regarding their practice in LINC Level 1-3 classrooms, especially when working with clients who were not making progress as expected through the reading benchmarks. Interview prompts included identifying classroom/instructional challenges and identifying the needs of these learners.

Participants were also asked to identify what they believed were key factors in the development and progression of reading for these clients. Some of the key factors identified in the literature were included in the prompts to gauge the participants' responses to the significance of these factors (e.g., learners' backgrounds, previous educational experiences, knowledge of and proficiency in other languages, and possible learning difficulties or disruptions in prior education; Burt et al, 2003; Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon 2008; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Strucker, 2002; TESOL, 2000; Wrigley et al., 2009). There were also claims made in some of the literature that mixed-level classes hinder the progress of learners (Beder & Medina, 2001; Jangles Productions, 2006; Kruidenier, 2002; McShane, 2005; Verma, 2004). The question prompts were designed to elicit reflection about the nature of classes and different learners that were



accommodated in mixed-level classes. The prompts also led the participants to reflect on which background factors (e.g., educational, personal employment, and/or health) were crucial to understanding the needs of learners who experience reading difficulties despite significant exposure to reading instruction. The factors identified in the literature were expected to be significant for the participants; however, the participants have identified other factors or found that the identified factors as less significant within their specific contexts.

Once the first interview was completed, a time and place was established for the second interview. Again, the times and locations were mutually determined by the participants and myself. Prior to the second interview, the participants were provided with a copy of the second interview protocol and requested to provide me with a copy of a monthly teaching plan (LINC instructors are required to submit such plans to LINC administrators monthly). As the interview process is highly reflective, participants were provided time in the second interview to discuss any thoughts that had emerged following the first interview. Field study notes were taken during the first interview by myself to provide a forum to frame any new areas of inquiry that arose during the interview process. This also allowed me to reflect on the process of conducting interviews. This process was also continued following the second interview. In some cases, it led to new lines of inquiry and in others it required clarification of positions. The participants' monthly plans formed the basis for reflection and discussion in the second interview. The intention of the second interview was to collect additional data about the participants' classroom practices. To support this discussion, participants were also asked to respond to the following interview prompts: (a) describe the reading tasks that

you have indicated for the month, (b) describe possible modifications for the activities to accommodate multiple needs in your class, and finally, (c) describe the steps taken or future steps to assist learners with great difficulties in reading and reading tasks in your classroom.

The rationale behind focusing on the teaching plans during the second interview was to make connections between planning for instruction and facilitating instruction. The competencies of learners as demonstrated through their Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs) may be incongruous with classroom realities. As LINC classes operate using a policy of continuous student intake, the classroom quite literally can change from day to day which necessitates ad hoc changes to the teaching plan throughout a given month. This also gave LINC instructors an opportunity to discuss stories arising from the classroom along with classroom triumphs and challenges related to planning for students with particular needs. Additionally, the inclusion of the monthly teaching plans here introduced triangulation to the study to support accuracy and credibility:

Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals (e.g., a principal and a student), types of data (e.g., observational field notes and interviews), or methods of data collection (e.g., documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research. (Creswell, 2008, p. 266)

All interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify emerging themes. Participants received copies of their transcribed interviews as well as any associated themes and conclusions. They were then invited to edit, amend, or clarify any responses and/or themes through a member-checking procedure (Creswell, 2008). Three of the

participants provided reflections that led to expansions and amendments to their transcripts. This also provided an added topic for discussion in the interviews or in telephone or email conversations following the second interview. Analysis of the teaching plans helped to illuminate and validate themes that emerged from the interviews, with participants being provided similar opportunities to review, edit, and/or clarify any emerging themes and conclusions and comment on the fair and representative nature of claims made by the participants and myself. This process was used to ensure that the participants were accurately represented.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The demographic questionnaires completed by the participants were analyzed using the simple descriptive statistics including mean, median, and standard deviation. A holistic analysis of participants' responses was also carried out by me (Creswell, 2007). This involved a detailed description of each set of responses, which was followed by a within-case analysis of themes. The method employed for analyzing and coding the text data reflected the general procedures outlined by Creswell (2003, 2008), Stake (2006), and Tesch (1990). The text data were read through once with ideas being noted within the margins of the transcripts. The data were then reviewed and labelled with codes to identify segments of the text related to the research questions. Next, the codes were clustered together to eliminate redundancies and reduce the number of codes for the final analysis. The codes were then used as the basis for identifying three major themes. These themes reflected the participants' perceptions and their descriptions of events in the text data. After a description of each set of responses was created and themes had been identified, a comparative and contractive analysis was carried out to identify themes

occurring across the case (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995, 2006). Comparison tables were used to compare participants' responses within the identified themes and with respect to their demographic information. The analysis of individual responses combined with a comparative and contrastive case analysis facilitated the final interpretative phase of the analysis where meaning could be derived from the issues contained within this case and formalized in a report of the findings (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995, 2006). Finally, the themes were placed within a conceptual framework and compared with the findings in the literature.

### **Methodological Assumptions and Limitations**

The rationale behind choosing a qualitative approach was to give the participants' beliefs and experiences a central role in the research. Accordingly, the primary basis of the data collected here was derived from participants' stories and interview responses. Teaching artifacts and field study notes provided a basis for discussion and refinement in the interviews.

In the context of this study, the participants represented a case within a similar context and in relation to the issue being explored. Although all of the participants shared many commonalities such as familiarity with CLBs, LINC guidelines, and possession of a TESL Ontario Certification, there were likely to be many areas of variation between the participants as well. For instance, the educational background of participants was varied. Admission into TESL training programs requires the possession of an undergraduate degree; however, the subject area is not mandated and neither is the possession of an honours undergraduate degree (TESL Ontario, 2011b). Some

instructors also possessed graduate degrees and/or certification by the Ontario College of Teachers.

The numbers of years of services also provided a great deal of variation, with some participants in the first years of their teaching career while others had been teaching for many years. None of the participants in this study had spent time teaching English as a foreign language overseas. However, the experiences of teaching English as a foreign language versus teaching English as a second language are quite different. In a second language classroom, learners are immersed in the new language entirely and have needs related to establishing their life in a new country. In a foreign language classroom, the language is typically manifested only within the classroom environment. The learners are dependent upon the instructor for linguistic input and output in the foreign language. Variation among the background of LINC instructors is unavoidable as there is no single designated path to becoming a LINC instructor. It was precisely this variation among the instructors that I wished to compare against the perceptions of reading instruction and reading difficulties by these LINC instructors. For instructors with fewer years of teaching experience or with an educational background less related to language studies and/or the English language, they might have had little exposure to challenges with reading development and instruction and/or little preparation for addressing such situations. As a result, their perceptions might not provide as much insight into the learners' experiences. By gathering demographic information about the participants, these limitations were exposed and taken into consideration as the text data were analyzed.

My professional experiences, as someone who has taught LINC Level 1-3 classes in the past, led me to identify LINC Levels 1-3 as an appropriate boundary for this research question. The LINC program includes classes which begin with Phase I Literacy level classes and continue up to LINC Level 7. For the literacy level classes, there are several differences which set them apart from the LINC Level 1 to 7 classes, with the greatest differences being class sizes and methodology. The size of LINC classes is mandated by the contracts from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). Literacy level classes are typically mandated to have smaller classes, with no more than four to six learners, while higher level classes typically contain 20-25 learners based on my experiences. The literacy level classes were ultimately excluded because they provide instruction that is distinct from other LINC classes in their methodology with a focus on developing literacy skills. Beyond the literacy level, there is a presumption that basic literacy skills are in place and the methodology is focused solely on second language instruction. During initial assessments, LINC clients are asked to self-identify as literate or having first language literacy needs. If clients are reluctant to disclose this information to the assessor but have adequate proficiency in English to complete some of the tasks in the assessment, they will given an assessment of CLB 1 or higher in reading and writing. It is the policy of LINC assessors to assign all learners with a benchmark of CLB 1 for listening and speaking regardless of their proficiency in English. This often results in placement in LINC Level 1 or higher. Within this group of clients is a subgroup of LINC clients who make extremely protracted progress through the LINC levels and may be frustrated and leave the program before reaching LINC Level 5.

The decision to choose LINC Level 3 as the ending boundary for participants was based on my personal experiences as someone who had taught a class spanning from LINC Level 1-3 for several years; I saw that learners frequently exited the LINC program around LINC 3 because they had gained sufficient proficiency in listening and speaking to find entry-level employment, though coupled with frustration over their lack of progress in reading and writing. As the boundary for LINC Levels 1-3 instructors is somewhat arbitrary, there is a possibility of excluding instructors above or below Levels 1 and 3 who may have perceptions that are relevant to the research questions. Future research may explore the perceptions of a wider sample which may include all LINC levels.

Utilizing a case study methodology presupposes certain truths about the data collected. It was assumed that the data context would be rich as the case was explored in-depth, creating a detailed and rich description of the case (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; 2006). It is, however, possible, that the participants did not fully embrace the process nor provide insightful response to the questions posed, feeling that this study had little relevance to their daily practice. The interview process and the involvement of the participants in reviewing and responding to their own data as well as the themes identified by me was intended to facilitate greater “buy-in” from the participants, and thus increase their likelihood of providing authentic responses. The inclusion of the participants’ teaching plans was intended to increase credibility of the data collection and facilitate connections between their daily practices and their reflections. The teaching plans served as a basis for discussion and helped to generate reflection which will led to the sharing of stories and classroom experiences. The teaching plan could also stimulate a response that had been overlooked in the interview prompts. The field study notes also

helped to clarify and bridge gaps that may have occurred during the interviews or member checking process.

The number of participants was sufficient to provide insights into the experiences of LINC Level 1-3 instructors who had been confronted with learners who experience continued reading difficulties in spite of adequate exposure to reading instruction. It also provided an understanding of the cases collected. However, this qualitative study was not designed to allow for the creation of generalizations about the LINC program, LINC instructors, or LINC clients. As in all qualitative studies, it is possible that the participants' experiences here are indicative of the experiences of other instructors. In this manner, that data presented here are intended to provide insights for others and encourage further exploration.

The analysis of data included a thorough examination of the interview data, which culminated in the identification of three common themes. The participants were asked to review the transcripts of their interviews and at such time they were permitted to amend their responses and/or make comments and suggestions related to the emerging themes from their responses. In the second interview, the participants were given an opportunity to discuss any thoughts or reflections that had arisen since the first interview was conducted. This also facilitated the process of member checking to ensure that themes identified were not limited to my interpretations and allowed for further triangulation of the data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The proposed design has taken into account the ethical considerations necessary when human participants are involved in research. In accordance with the Canadian



Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's (1998) *Tri-Council Policy Statement*, research for this study began once clearance had been granted through the Brock University's Research Ethics Board.

There were no physical or psychological risks for the participants associated with this study and no deception was involved, with every effort made to reduce any potential risks to the participants. For this study confidentiality was an important issue. As data were collected from interviews between the participants and myself, it was impossible to offer anonymity to the participants. However, the letter of invitation and the informed consent procedure ensured complete confidentiality of the participants' names, contact information including associated LINC sites, and interview responses. Participants were informed that all personal identifiers related to themselves as well as their employers or clients would be removed in any reporting of the data and study conclusions. Participants were only referred to by pseudonyms, with the exclusion of myself, and the supporting data related to the themes were only described in general terms (i.e., specific countries, ethnicities, or languages were not identified). Access to the data was confined to myself, my supervisor, and a transcriber who was bound by a confidentiality agreement prior to gaining access to any data.

All documentation, transcripts, and audio tapes were kept in a locked area of my home office and were retained only until data collection was completed and the final report written. Following this, all recordings and associated documentation were destroyed. Participants were informed in the letter of invitation and informed consent that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any personal or professional

consequences. If a participant had withdrawn, his or her data would have been omitted from the study and destroyed; however, this situation did not occur.

Finally, any further harm associated with participating in this study was minimized by involving the participants in a member-checking procedure (Creswell, 2008; Stake, 1995, 2006). All participants were provided with transcripts from their interviews which included my notes regarding theme identification. The participants were asked to assess the accuracy of the transcripts and make comments based on their own responses or the themes proposed by me. This ensured that the participants had not been misrepresented and that they were comfortable with the portrayal of their responses.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore LINC Level 1-3 instructors' perceptions of reading instruction and reading difficulties. A qualitative approach employing a case study design was used to collect LINC instructors' experiences and stories. Text data resulting from the demographic questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were analyzed on an individual case basis before a comparative and contrastive case analysis was completed. In addition, exemplars of instructors' monthly teaching plan and field study notes were used to generate discussion, reflection, and the sharing of classroom stories within the second interview. The combination of demographic information, semi-structured interviews focused on reflection on practice, and analysis of the monthly teaching plans contributed to an understanding of LINC instructors' perceptions of clients' reading instruction and reading difficulties in LINC Level 1-3 classes. It was hoped that an examination of these perceptions would reveal

why some LINC clients struggle to make progress in reading as well as some of the key factors influencing their protracted progress. The findings are presented in chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

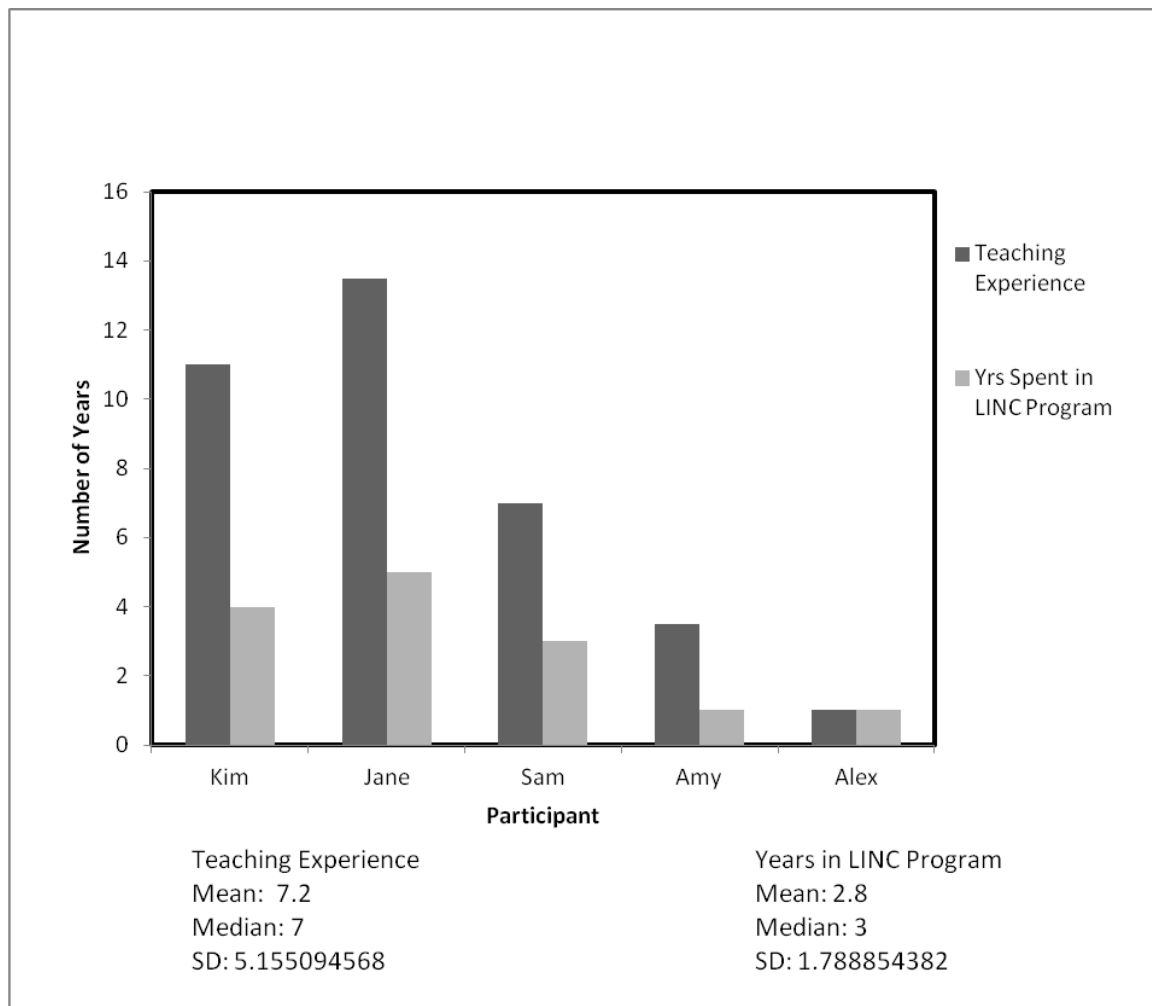
The purpose of this study was to investigate LINC instructors' perceptions of reading instruction and reading difficulties within LINC Level 1 to 3 classrooms. Using qualitative research methods, data were collected in the form of semi-structured interviews, demographic questionnaires, and teaching artifacts in order to create a case study of the five participants. Once individual's responses were collected, a comparative and contrastive case analysis was conducted to compare participants' perceptions (Creswell, 2008; Yin, 2003). A thematic coding of the interview data revealed three major themes with several subthemes. This chapter will describe and merge the perspectives present in the resulting themes and subthemes. The data analysis will address not only the themes revealed in the interviews, but also the data collected in the demographic questionnaire and the teaching plans provided by each instructor.

The interviews revealed a number of common and divergent themes among the five participants. Three principal themes were identified with a number of subthemes contained within each theme. The convergence or divergence of opinions between participants varied within each of the themes and subthemes. The three main themes identified were classified as (a) client/instructor backgrounds and classroom needs, (b) reading strategies, methods, and challenges, and (c) assessment expectations and progress. Each theme had a number of corresponding subthemes (see figure 8). Within the theme of client/instructor backgrounds and classroom needs, there were eight subthemes: (i) class size, (ii) mixed levels, (iii) client backgrounds/goals/needs, (iv) administration/volunteer/peer support, (v) skill development, (vi) continuous intake and attendance, (vii) instructors' undergraduate background and TESL training, and (viii)

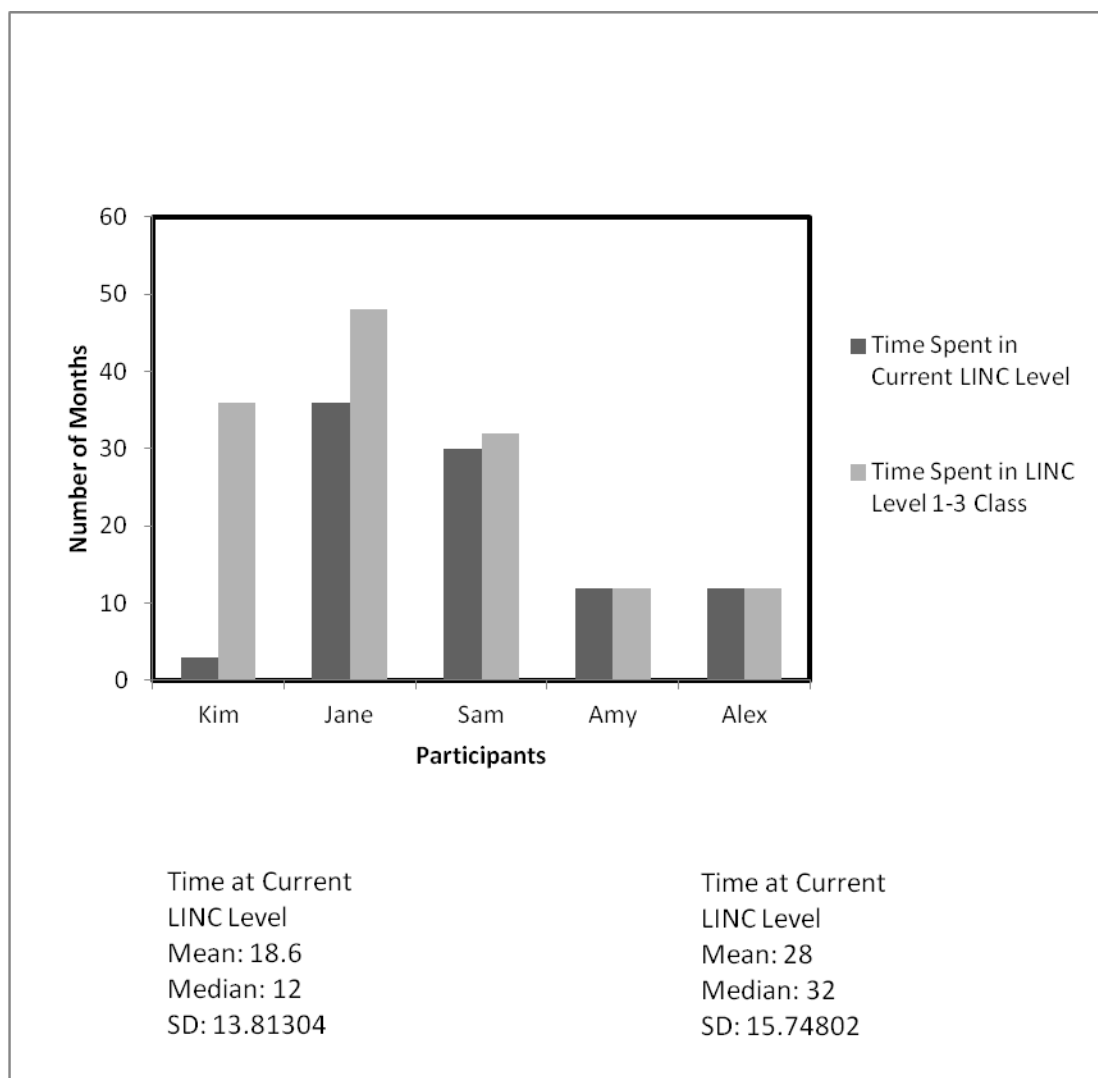
instructor needs. Within the theme of reading strategies, methods and challenges, there were four subthemes: (i) reading strategies, (ii) instructional methods, (iii) reading challenges in class, and (iv) first language literacy problems. Within the final main theme, assessment expectations and progress, there were three subthemes: (i) classroom progress, (ii) benchmark/LINC level progression, and (iii) benchmark expectations. This chapter will include a presentation of descriptive statistics for the demographic data obtained from each participant, as well as discussion of the themes and subthemes with supporting comments from the interview data and teaching artifacts. Connections will also be made between the identified themes and subthemes and the research questions set forth by me.

### **Demographic Data**

The data obtained from the demographic questionnaires were analyzed simply by means of descriptive statistics including: mean, median, and standard deviation. The years of teaching experience provided by the five participants indicated a spectrum that spanned one to 13.5 years. This broad range of teaching experience provided viewpoints from a beginning teacher to more experienced educators, allowing for more varied perspectives. Although there is significant variation in the number of years of teaching experience in general, there is far less variation between participants with respect to the number of years in the LINC program (see figure 6). The range for number of years within the LINC program spanned from one year to five years. Also, when the length of time spent at the current LINC Level was compared with the length of time spent teaching LINC Levels 1-3, the numbers were identical with the exception of two participants (see figure 7). Participants Kim, Jane, and Sam taught other LINC



*Figure 6.* Number of years of teaching experience contrasted against number of years spent in the LINC program.



*Figure 7.* Number of months spent at current LINC level contrasted against number of months spent in a LINC level 1-3 class.

Levels while Amy and Alex taught only at their current LINC Levels.

The study design focused on collecting data from LINC Levels 1-3, as these levels are the beginning levels for many students who join the LINC program above the Literacy Level. At the time of data collection, three of the participants were teaching split-level classes including LINC Levels 1 and 2. The remaining participants were teaching a dedicated LINC Level 3 class and split-level LINC Level 3-5 class. In addition, one of the participants had a split-level class that included Phase III Literacy and LINC Level 1.

Within the LINC program, Literacy students are divided into to four phases: a Foundation Phase and Phases I, II, and, III (see figure 4, p. 43).

The Foundation Phase constitutes a separate LINC Level. As shown in figure 4, Phase I Literacy corresponds to LINC Level 1. Phase II Literacy corresponds approximately to LINC Levels 2 and 3, where there is a transition to Phase III Literacy which continues from LINC Level 3 to LINC Level 5. However, despite this, the participants' Literacy Level classes did not echo this framework. One of the participants was teaching a class, Phase III Literacy/LINC Level 1, at that time that did not correspond to the framework and the descriptions provided by the other participants of their own classes or simply the Literacy Level classes within their provider did not correspond to this description. This may lead to some questions regarding the integration of LINC Literacy Levels and the higher LINC Levels that is outside the scope of this study as the intent was to focus on LINC Level 1-3 classes and not Literacy Level classes. Finally, although the call for participants was posted nationwide on the TESL Ontario website, all participants were recruited from one of two cities in Southern



Ontario. With the exception of Kim, who has who worked in various cities across Ontario, all of the participants had only worked with LINC programs located in their current city. As a result, only Kim was able to compare LINC programs delivery in different cities. She cited greater organization outside of the city where she began working in the LINC program, with greater opportunities for professional development for both instructors and clients.

### **Teaching Plans**

The teaching plans collected from participants were used as the basis for conversation in the second interviews as participants were asked to describe the contexts of their plans and reflect on their opinion of the efficacy of the plan in meeting their instructional goals and the needs of their learners. The five individual plans were unique in scope and the specificity of the tasks. For example, Jane and Kim provided monthly plans which categorized instruction into specific weeks. These plans also included objectives related to a monthly theme along with a resource list and a list of assessment tools, in addition to the weekly task breakdown. Sam provided a weekly plan that divided each day into segments of time according to activity. Each day in her plan was dedicated to a specific language skill. Amy also provided a weekly plan that outlined specific tasks for specific segments of time over the course of the week. Alex's plan was simply a collection of materials used over the course of a class without any sort of narrative description of his plan for that day. In the second interview, he detailed how he has used these materials, but his submission was very different than the plans of the other participants. References from these plans were included in the discussion of themes

where appropriate and when possible based on the amount of detail provided in each individual plan.

### **Themes**

The interview data obtained from the five participants were analyzed and coded for commonly occurring themes. I analyzed and coded the interview data before providing participants with the opportunity to review their own interview transcriptions and narratives for accuracy, clarity, and additional qualification. The analysis yielded three primary themes (client/instructor backgrounds and classroom needs, reading strategies, methods and challenges, and assessment expectations and progress) (see figure 8, each consisting of a number of subthemes).

#### **Client/Instructor Backgrounds and Classroom Needs Themes**

The first theme identified was client/instructor backgrounds and classroom needs. This theme described the backgrounds and needs of the clients and instructors inside and, in some cases, outside of the classroom. It also described the instructors' responses to the needs of the clients. Within this theme, a further eight subthemes were identified, including: class size, mixed levels, client background/goals and needs, administrative/volunteer/peer support, skill development, continuous intake and attendance, instructors' undergraduate backgrounds/TESL training, and instructor needs. All of the themes were represented by at least four of the five participants, with the exception of skill development and instructor needs, which were represented by only two participants (Sam and Alex) and continuous intake and attendance which was represented by only one participant (Alex).

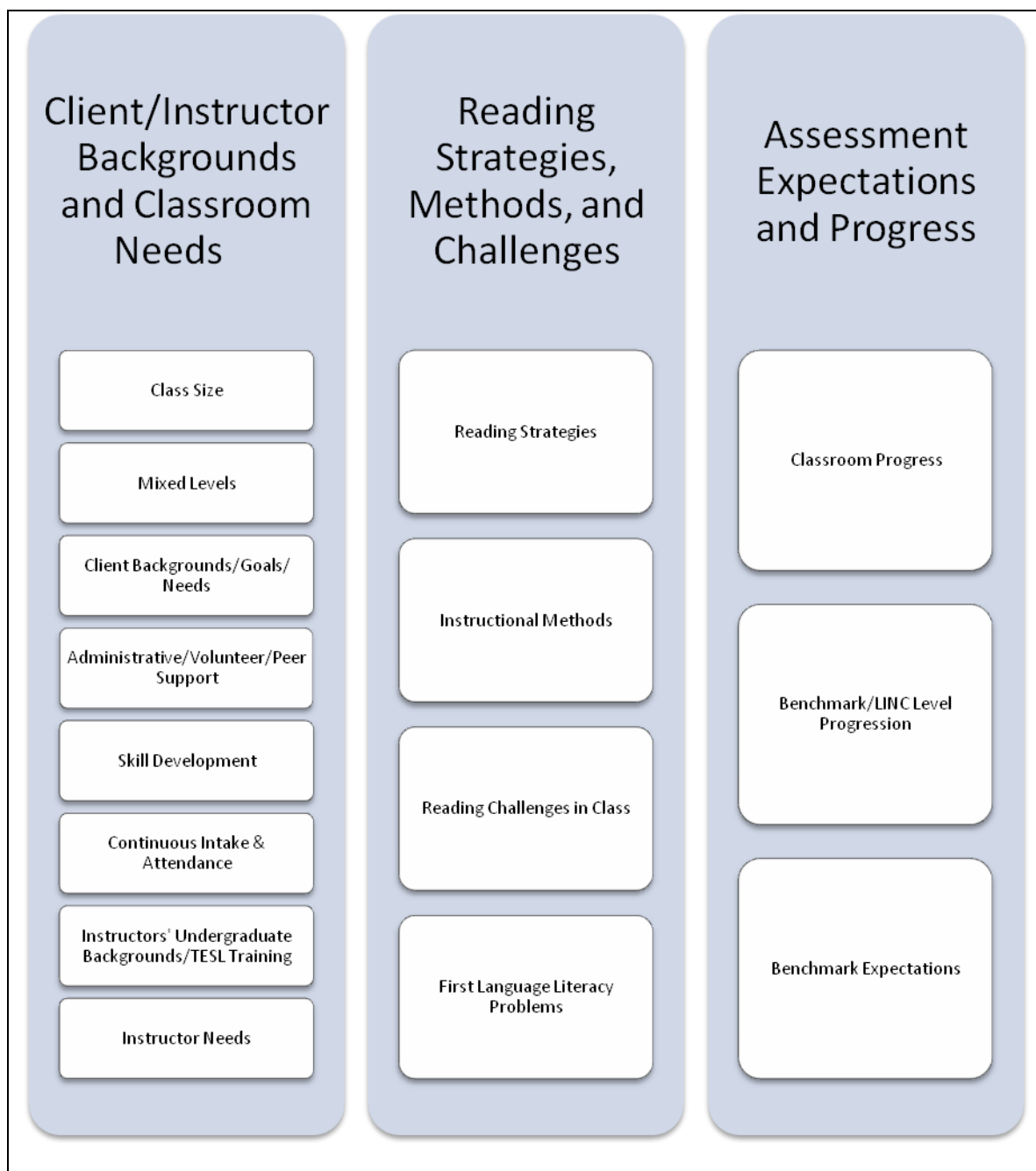


Figure 8. Theme Matrix.

The subtheme that was represented with the greatest frequency among all the participants was client backgrounds/goals and needs. This subtheme acknowledged the varied backgrounds of the LINC Levels 1-3 clients within the LINC program including their educational, employment, and personal backgrounds. This subtheme also discussed the variable goals and needs of these clients. Individual differences in motivation and end goals were acknowledged as effecting students' learning and class performance, as was previous educational experience and personal commitments and responsibilities. Participants received very little background information about incoming clients, with some receiving none or perhaps only a paragraph. Kim stated:

We really don't get a lot of information about their background. We get a referral form, and it will have their name, and their country, and it will have their benchmarks, and their [four language] skills, but that's really all it tells us. (First interview)

Jane reiterated the limited amount of information available but indicated some additional, although limited, sources of information:

I can look in those files [on the ARS or HARTS] as to how many years of education they've had prior to Canada. It doesn't tell me anything like was it interrupted or you know any of the circumstances of any of the education. (First interview)

Sam, who when compared with the other participants occupied a middle position in terms of years of teaching experience, time in the LINC program, and time in LINC Level 1-3 classes, had quite a different experience, indicating that a paragraph provided sufficient information:

You get a full page with an update before it, which has all the information about them, including where they are from, and they should be in this level because they have knowledge of this, this, and this. There is a paragraph, a brief paragraph, which is fine for us to understand. (First interview)

Information about client background and previous education can facilitate the integration of new clients into a class and assist in instructional planning in a more efficient manner. This information can be especially important as clients may join a LINC class at any time.

The participants also discussed how clients' personal commitments and responsibilities affected their daily and long-term performance, motivation, and end goals. Participants spoke about their clients' individual circumstances and how these circumstances played an integral role in their classrooms. Kim spoke about the challenges that go beyond the scope of instructors:

There's a lot of social work that goes unstated just because a lot of these people have come from very terrible circumstances, and they may be adjusting to life here. They've got no family or their circumstances may be very, very different from what they're used to in their country. So, a lot of them are struggling just to find their way and to figure out how to fit in here (First interview).

Sam mentioned the family commitments:

There are some people who have 12 kids, eight kids, six kids. They are grandmothers. For other reasons, because they are not high school or elementary-aged kids—you know, they don't have money [for daycare and cannot attend school consistently]. They have a lot of worries. ... Some people have never gone

to school. They have never even written anything with a pen or a pencil.

Everybody is different. (First interview)

Further comments included the following from Amy: “A few of them haven’t completed their education. And then, there are some others who have completed university in their countries and were working as professionals” (First interview); and from Alex: “In their situation, I think a lot of them have very difficult backgrounds. For example, one of my students spent a number of years in a refugee camp, so the classroom is something that’s almost foreign” (Second interview). Such educational and personal differences often result in clients developing divergent goals or perhaps even having had divergent goals before joining the LINC program. It also requires instructors to adopt varied instructional approaches in order to accommodate individual needs and goals, according to Kim:

I think it would be better to look at the backgrounds of students a little bit more, and differentiate people according to their educational backgrounds. Having people who have only had a few years of formal education in the same classroom with people who’ve done 12, 13, 14 years of education seems kind of strange to me. The more educated people have more strategies for learning, and I think they’re more able to take things on their own. (First interview)

Alex also mentioned the idea that the intrinsic value of formal education may vary between cultures and that this may translate into clients demonstrating different needs and goals:

Where they grew up, they weren’t exposed to books very much. School might have been very intermittent or spotty, and they had to go a long way to get there. The quality of education and the importance of education might not have been

stressed or the benefits of education were marginal because even if you did manage to finish high school, there weren't many jobs, and civil war was going to wipe out any chance of industry, commerce, or professions, and you're going to end up in a refugee camp anyway regardless of how many years you spent in school. (Second interview)

Jane talked about the role of prior education:

From what I've worked with my students, education is a huge factor. I don't want to say it is the factor because I don't believe that's true for everyone. There are some younger women who might be about 20 years old, and they've had a teeny, tiny, bit of education in their own language. Their ability at that age and just naturally where they are in life without other huge stressors or other factors, they might be able to exceed the expectations that I might place on another student. (First interview)

When asked about meeting students' needs, Jane stated, "Well, I know for a fact, I'm not meeting everyone's needs every day. It's virtually impossible to do that" (First interview). Amy spoke about the lack of clarity about students' learning goals: "It's very clear there are some that aren't too sure what their goal is, and some have been teachers, or nurses in their home country" (First interview). It is extremely challenging for a student or an instructor to try and meet needs and goals that are not well defined or that exceed the capabilities of the classroom setting.

The third subtheme was related to administrative/volunteer/peer support. Only three of the participants (Sam, Jane, and Kim) indicated having had any kind of volunteer support in their classrooms, and with the exception of 1 participant (Sam), volunteer

support was sporadic and unpredictable. The amount of administrative support was also quite varied. The lack of consistent administrative or volunteer support made peer support essential for students and instructors, according to Kim:

I really felt that I needed some help to meet the needs of my students. So, it's nice when a volunteer is there. It helps because then that's a second person to go around, and work if there's someone who's particularly having trouble. They can work off to the side with someone, and maybe give that person a little bit of extra attention that I can't do because I've got to keep the whole group going. (First interview)

Jane reiterated the importance of volunteer support in her class: "So, as far as volunteers go, they are super important to me right now. And the reading and writing has improved with the two students that I send off individually with tutors—with volunteers. Yeah, it's a good thing" (Second interview). Sam was somewhat conflicted about the presence of volunteers and/or teaching assistants in the classroom:

There is one teaching assistant, I don't like to have her in my class. This is my other problem. I don't want too many helpers because one person should be speaking. That's what I like. I want control over my class. Different teachers speak different ways. (First interview)

Those who had no volunteer or teaching assistant support, like Amy, used other methods in the classroom to assist weaker students:

If we're doing group work, it's easy to fall into one student doing all of the work if you don't give each student in the group a specific task to finish and put in with



part of the group. So, if I'm doing something together, I given them a specific task by designing different roles [for the students]. (First interview)

Collaboration was a recurring idea among all of the participants although for some of the participants collaboration was between students and for others between teachers and /or between administrators. Kim talked about the relationship between herself and her colleagues:

I had quite a good relationship with the people, who were teaching the literacy class when I was teaching the 1/2/3 [class] because like I said, there was a long waiting list. So, we were trying to work together, and also work together with assessment. She would take assessments that I was using and modify them slightly, so that her assessments looked more like mine and when the students did progress to my class it wasn't such a big change because literacy is so different from what happens in Level 1. (First interview)

On occasion, collaboration was required between teachers and administrators to solve day-to-day issues according to Jane:

Even last week, a student was referred to my class because she's Level 2, but she's something like speaking: 4, listening: 3, and her writing is 2, and her reading is 3. And she was put in my class because she's a Level 2. Meanwhile, there's a class next door, same building, same time which she should be attending, so I switched her with administration here. We switched her to the other class. She didn't even walk in my door. (First interview)

Several participants also spoke about a collaborative spirit between the students in their classes. Jane stated:

There's some sort of community spirit within the women here that are supportive of each other, so that if someone's from the same cultural group or they make a friendship with another person in the class, that they do find ways to kind of— somehow there's some kind of information transfer between the clients within my class than can somehow override the gaps that I might not even see. (First interview)

This was also the experience of Alex who described one of his European students assisting some of East African students:

He was showing them something. So, they got the idea that they can learn from their classmates, and I think he felt good that he had the confidence to help his classmates. And they liked the fact that they were getting a little support from somebody else. (Second interview)

Collaboration between the students seems to help foster a sense of community and allow students to explore self-direction as a means of learning, which may have been previously unknown to them. For some LINC clients, a collaborative approach may be a familiar part of formal or informal learning in their culture. It also appears to fill gaps that otherwise may be insurmountable. Although administrative/volunteer/peer support was referred to by all of the participants, in varying capacities, no mention of administrative or volunteer support was made in the plans of any of the participants. Jane and Kim's plans, however, did make mention of peer support in the descriptions of some of the activities in their plans. Jane described an activity in her plan called "Find Your Part," where the students completed a health related activity in three parts. The first part involved matching a picture of an illness with the corresponding body part. The second

part involved a discussion between students about what treatment is required in the event of this particular illness. The final part of this activity was a class discussion comparing the differences between treatment in Canada and the students' home country (Jane, Teaching Plan, p. 2). Kim described an activity in her plan called "Job Wall," where students were asked to match pictures of jobs with labels and create short descriptions of the job on a white board to create a job wall reference for the students during the month (Kim, Teaching Plan, p. 1). Thus, in both of these activities the instructors have used an approach that relies on peer interaction and support to accomplish this activity. While the other instructors may have used a similar approach, it was not made explicit in their plans.

The next subtheme mentioned by the participants referred to mixed-level classes. Four of the five participants spoke about the effects of mixed-level classes. One of the latter participants adopted a neutral position toward them and another spoke about positives. However, the participants also listed a number of challenges. These challenges included the spectrum of student learning needs. Kim felt very strongly about the negative effects of mixed-level classes:

One of the most damaging things is the mixed-level classes. Even if you had a purely Level 1 class, there would still be a spectrum of variety within there. So, having a class that's a 1/2/3 or a 1/2, I just think it's far too much variety, and I think mixed-level classes are probably one of the biggest issues. (First interview)

A broad spectrum of levels creates challenges for students at the higher and lower levels and also for the instructors, as Kim described, in terms of instructional design:

And then there are people on the lower end, who are really, really struggling, and really need more individual attention. And it's difficult to give them that. I try to meet as many needs as I can, but honestly, to say that you meet the needs of everyone, it's difficult. (First interview)

Jane provided similar comments:

Ideally, you'd have a single level class. That's ideal for any teacher. But within that level, I know I'd still be putting out multilevel resources for the students to use, and I'd still be doing different testing based on the students. It just would not be quite a much. I do feel it's so difficult to meet the student's required needs. Like to get them on a path where they are successful at the pace they need to be at, those things would be better addressed in either a Level 1 only class or Level 2 only class. But I struggle with that because I'm so used to the multilevel class. I think that sometimes it does have benefits to the learners. (First interview)

Although mixed-level classes may increase the difficulty in meeting students' needs, it may also have some benefits or as in the case of three of the participants simply become their everyday reality. Thus, the divergent responses of participants do not definitively single out this subtheme as a major problem in all classes.

The fourth subtheme referred to class size. Although class size was mentioned by all of the participants, their experiences were quite different. Some participants had very large classes while others had classes that were much smaller. Kim who had worked with large classes commented:

Yes, it's a big problem, trying to keep them busy, and keep them feeling that they're getting some value from that what's going on, without taking the time

away to spend with the people who really need it. ... I had 32 students in the morning and about 26 in the afternoon. (First interview)

Sam stated, “so because my class is up to 20 people, I need to accommodate a range of benchmarks within the skills,” and finally, “my morning class is 20 students. It’s full, completely full. And my afternoon, I have 15. That’s my limit” (First interview). However, Sam had quite a unique perspective; she expressed that based on her previous classroom experiences in her birth country, that were up to three times larger, the relatively small class size of 20 students was challenging: “I was actually used to teaching all by myself in my home country, teaching 60 kids, 60 students, high school students, on my own in the classroom. So for me, I now had a problem teaching a class of 20” (First interview). The remaining participants had classes that were significantly smaller than the other instructors and made statements such as Amy noting that, “Luckily, I don’t have a big class. We have six students” (First interview), and similarly from Alex:

Well, on my attendance list I have 10 students although I’ve never had 10 with this group. I haven’t had 10 since last spring. So, it could vary from one to nine. And then the afternoon could be a lot less. So, I would say right now, seven or eight in the mornings and three or four in the afternoons. (First interview)

The comments about class size demonstrated extreme variations between different class sizes within these levels and also demonstrated different feelings among the participants about they felt was a manageable class size. They also provided diverse comments about how class size effected students’ experiences.

Two participants, Sam and Alex, referred to the development of three particular life skills. The first was the development of organization skills: “If they know all these organization skills, they can organize their kids. I want to teach them organization. You know, that’s how you organize yourself, your doctor’s appointment, your this, your that” (Sam, First interview). The second skill mentioned was punctuality, which also included collegiality and motivation:

If I could impress upon them the importance of punctuality in Canada, the importance of focusing on a goal and seeing it through, importance of the partnership that I would like to form with them, it would be better. I find a lot of them are very casual in their punctuality. When they come in, they sometimes are tired or they’re not interested. (Alex, First interview)

The third skill involved using classroom experiences as a bridging experience for future employment:

So if I could just make them see this [classroom] is the beginning of the road which leads to a good job, or a job, money, independence, self-sufficiency, and a better life for your children. Some of them seem to lack that drive. If there was one thing I could do is to try and make them understand that it’s not just a classroom, but it’s going to be the job eventually. You’re not going to be able to keep a job if you can’t come in on time. (Alex, First interview).

Both participants talked about how these skills related to integration and overcoming the challenges faced by many newcomers:

When you come to Canada, life is like a big wall. There is a big wall inside of you that you have to break and then go through to the other side. ... You have to explore the new world, and every time, it's a challenge. (First interview)

It is interesting that these participants' attributed these client behaviours to a lack of drive or motivation when they may have reflected social and familial responsibilities. As noted in the responses of the other participants, many of their clients have work and familial responsibilities outside of the classroom which greatly impact on their ability to perform in class. The finding suggests that clients from non-western countries may be placed into a western system that does not support or value their learning styles, cultures, or needs. The system itself may be marginalizing clients by imposing western standards and practices on clients from the non-western world.

The sixth subtheme referred to continuous intake and attendance. In the LINC program, intake occurs on any day on which the LINC program is operating throughout the year. Thus, a new student may enter a class at any time. Four out of five of the participants mentioned the challenges created by continuous intake. Kim stated, "There are always people coming in, but there are also people who've been there for a while" (First interview). Jane stated:

When new people come in, it wouldn't necessarily be on a Monday morning, you know, they'll just come in whenever. And then you're greeted with a piece of paper and then you just sort of have to keep going, right? If you're in mid-stride when they come in and you have to keep going, and then after, you can sort of put the pieces together after the fact. (First interview)

Sam voiced strong opinions against continuous intake:

There's a challenge there. Stressful because you have already planned your class until up to that point, and you are planning the next level. All of a sudden, you have to go back. Oh, you have to plan something that will be in the middle. Something like that. So, you're planning, sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't and you have to keep making a new plan, re-plan. I would like to change that. I would wait at least until the semester end. The new students should not come before that. (First interview)

Only Alex commented on attendance:

Well, attendance and punctuality, one of the main issues, and I don't know how you can change that. If I had a magic wand and made them all show up at 9:00 and back from break and lunch on time and stay until 2:30 and then go home and do an hour of homework every night. That would make a big difference. (Second interview)

Continuous intake is a factor that affects the everyday functioning of a class and makes planning for instruction challenging. Attendance was similarly identified as challenging by one participant. These factors not only impact the instructors' management of the class but also the progress of the students within it.

The seventh subtheme, instructors' undergraduate backgrounds/TESL training, was mentioned by all participants with two of the participants making strong connections between their own education and their teaching. Their undergraduate education was in languages and/or linguistics and it was their passion for learning languages that led them to teach in the LINC program. As Amy stated, "I was a French Immersion kid, and I think that influenced me to love languages, and literature and expression—



communication” (First interview). Kim said, “A linguistics background definitely fits well. I mean, you get some linguistics in the TESL training but having a degree in linguistics, experience in learning other languages, it definitely, I think, helps” (First interview). She also connected her own experiences as a learner of languages to the experiences and needs of the students:

If you’ve studied languages yourself, you have more knowledge and empathy for what it’s like to learn a language. And you’ve had experience being on the other side when it’s taught. So, you might take that into your experiences when you’re teaching as well. (First interview)

The educational backgrounds of LINC instructors are highly varied and representative of multiple disciplines. The other participants in this group had backgrounds in English, French, Political Science, and Home Economics. The purpose of TESL training is to provide a theoretical framework for teaching in the LINC program along with practical teaching experience. In order to teach in a LINC classroom, instructors must hold a teaching certificate from TESL Ontario. However, once instructors become certified, LINC providers and LINC instructors can develop their own instructional approaches. Thus instruction can vary across different instructors and/or LINC providers:

I guess the framework is meant to be the same for how we do things, but because our everyday realities are so different, you go onto the classroom, and you shut your door, and it’s kind of, I mean, like most teachers, right? What goes on within your classroom is unique, right? (Kim, Second interview)

Alex also talked about instructors' varied backgrounds and previous careers: "So we've all got various backgrounds, but none of us are like long-term career teachers" (Second interview). It is clear from the response of the participants that the TESL training is the unifying force between them as their prior backgrounds are so varied. That being said, the individual experiences of the instructors within the classroom and within their own institutions, along with their own personal experiences, produce very different classroom results that are apparent from the comments of the instructors and by looking at the teaching plan exemplars.

The final subtheme, instructor needs, was discussed by only two of the participants and discussed the daily classroom needs of instructors. When asked about making changes to her daily instruction to meet her students' needs, Sam stated:

I think I have been doing it for the past two or three years the same way, so I couldn't really, you know, when you asked me I said this is normal. So, yes when somebody asks me, it is a little different. I'm doing it every single day, every week. (Second interview)

When discussing her plan, this instructor had a very fixed plan with certain days always focused on certain skills. In contrast, Alex had a more flexible approach to his daily plans and was very reflective about his own limitations and gaps in expertise:

I know that I need to improve my techniques in transferring that knowledge to them- the technicalities of reading and decoding, or pronunciation. I still see the weaknesses in my ability to teach. But I think that I've made a good connection with my students. (First interview)

These two participants identified the need to support instructors in developing new methods and techniques for teaching the LINC curriculum, partially due to gaps in their own abilities, for which there was no direct or immediate solution.

### **Link to Research Questions**

The instructors' comments within this theme connect to the previous and current life and educational experiences of the clients. I wanted to investigate these experiences and explore their impact on the classroom performance of LINC Level 1-3 clients. While the instructors provided some insight into previous experiences within this theme, the vast majority of participants' comments centered on their current experiences with clients. The subthemes raised by instructors—such as attendance, skill development, and mixed-level classes—relate more to issues of classroom management than the individual experiences of the clients. The clients, however, do offer some explanations for these themes which in some cases connect with the clients' personal experiences. The instructors are consistently clear about the effects of these themes, primarily negative, on the progress of their students. The final two subthemes were unexpected outcomes, extending from the original research questions. A small number of the participants raised concerns about their own backgrounds and needs as instructors. They discussed their needs with respect to continuing their growth as instructors and meeting the needs of their students. As the students' abilities and needs were being discussed through the lens of the instructors, it should come as no surprise that some of the instructors self-identified their own abilities and needs. While this was not anticipated at the outset of data collection, these comments provide some insight into what occurs in the instructors' classrooms. These comments also speak to some of the systemic challenges within the

LINC program where some instructors are better prepared and supported for providing daily instruction.

### **Reading Strategies, Methods, and Challenges Themes**

The second theme, reading, contained four subthemes described in order of significance: instructional methods, reading challenges in class, reading strategies, and first language literacy problems. This group of themes addressed how the instructors plan and conduct reading instruction as well as associated the challenges faced by the instructors. The five participants' monthly lesson plans were used as a basis for discussion in the second interview and provided specific points of reference to the reading instruction provided by the instructors.

The primary subtheme within this theme was instructional methods. All of the participants discussed daily classroom needs, inclusion, differentiation, and the associated limitations. All of the instructors uniformly talked about the challenges of reaching each student; however, not all of the instructors responded in the same manner. Although differentiation and inclusion were discussed, the teaching plans provided by participants showed no evidence of this. Instead, the instructors appear to individualize as a function of classroom management and/or material selection versus instructional design. Only two of the teaching plans included a list of potential resources, with the remaining listing specific titles. This led me to surmise that some instructors rely on certain materials while others are using a patchwork of resources. Three of the participants talked about how they differentiated tasks within their lessons to accommodate a spectrum of learners. Kim stated, "So, what I ended up doing is differentiating the tasks that we're doing and trying to come up with two, maybe three different methods for one assignment that can

be accomplished by everyone within the group” (First interview). This strategy was reiterated by Sam, who described a reading activity:

If I’m doing a story, I would have to have a teacher’s aide sit with them, read with them, or if I’m doing some kind of vocabulary, I will have special papers for them which will have pictures on them. You know, like difficult words and all that stuff because they can’t understand many things. (Second interview)

Two of the participants expressed regret at not being able to divide their classes by reading ability. Kim stated, “It would be nice to be able to break people into reading groups, but without extra assistance, again, it’s kind of a tricky thing to do, to have someone else to sort of moderate the process with me” (First interview). Being unable to divide students prevented this instructor from completing activities that she believed were necessary for her students: “I would love to break it down further, and do more phonics, but we just don’t really have the time” (Kim, First interview). Jane had similar concerns: “I mean, I can’t even divide them into four groups because I don’t have a way to manage each group properly” (First interview). Amy talked about dividing her students into partners, which she did that as a normal part of her instruction rather than a reaction to her students’ needs: “I try to vary that a bit as well, so that everybody gets a chance to be partnered with everybody. First, I’ll choose a stronger reader with a weaker reader” (First interview). Although these approaches appear similar at first glance, the realities are quite different. The instructional methods, on the one hand, used in a class of six to enhance reading strategies and comprehension, and on the other hand, in a much larger class with a different objective. Jane spoke about creating inclusion by creating a task

that a varied group of students could accomplish simultaneously while the instructor's attention is divided between approximately 20 students with varied abilities and needs:

Yes, because the amount of time that I would need to pre-teach and go through those things with the lower-level students, my other students would be half finished the task. Yeah, trying to keep the flow of the classroom, like you say "setting people up for success," but challenging them enough that they're motivated and they're engaged. (Second interview)

Similar to this idea, Alex discussed students' varied skill levels. In particular, this participant noted the differences in the skill levels in reading and writing when contrasted against the skill levels in listening and speaking:

I need to find a way to kind of overcome the skill level differences between the students and their writing abilities. So, yeah, I think that's the area that needs the most work for me and for them. That's the anchor right there. And if I could get them to read and write better, it would help their speaking, I'm sure. Because then, they could see their words and see—I'm sure would help them to internalize language. (First interview)

The participants described differentiation of tasks and the need to divide their students into reading groups based on ability; however, none of this was made explicit by any of the participants in their plans. All of the plans provided a very generic description of the activity without specifying how the needs of different students are met.

The second subtheme involved reading challenges. The participants discussed the challenges faced by their students in terms of reading tasks while discussing some of reasons they perceived as the cause of these challenges. One of the reasons cited by

several of the participants, which was also mentioned by many participants as an essential trait of a good reader, was experience in reading. Kim said:

Some people just automatically make meaning on their own because they're used to reading well in their own language, and so they can just pick up, and go with English without any difficulty. And then other people are less experienced, less proficient readers in their first language, and they're really at the beginning.

(First interview)

Alex elaborated:

I think that, for the most part, my students have little reading education and instruction in reading, probably limited access to books. I would say they're handicapped in their choice of reading material. They seem to be attracted to reading, but they don't know how to approach it. (Second interview)

This participant also questioned whether all students valued reading as well as their reading experience: "I wonder how much reading and writing they've ever done in their lives. They might have learned the basics of it, but they didn't have much need for or a purpose" (First interview). Some of the students in LINC Levels 1-3 progress from the LINC Literacy classes while other join the LINC program in a LINC Level 1 class or higher which also has a noticeable effect on those students who struggle with reading and writing. The LINC Literacy Level classes expressly address the needs of learners who may not be fully literate in their first language. In contrast, the non-literacy LINC Level classes do not have this specific focus accompanied with larger class sizes. Jane talked about the differences between students who progress from a literacy class and those who

do not:

If someone walks in my door from literacy, I know they can copy from the board. I know that they're still going to have a lot of challenges with other issues, but there are some basic school skills that they've got. (First interview)

She also offered some insight about factors that impact her students' daily performance:

Somebody can be super tired because their child was up all night because they were sick with a fever, come to school and their concentration is really weak. So, when they're sitting in front of a reading task versus if I gave them a partner speaking/listening activity, their performance is much lower because their brain's not there, right literally. (First interview)

Sam discussed new students who join the class with decoding and letter/sound correspondence: "All of a sudden, these students come, and they have no idea what letter sound it is. Then, I really have problems when I start the letter sounds all over again. It takes me like a month" (First interview). For Alex, these difficulties were not limited to just a few students, but the root cause of the problem was uncertain:

I'm sure there are parts of both of those issues in the problem. I'm not really sure what it would be because if I had more experience I can maybe recognize the causes or the sources of the problems. So, I assume that there's maybe a little bit of a reading problem, little bit of a comprehension problem, little bit of a mismatch in their language skills. (Second interview)

The participants here faced a number of reading-related challenges—challenges which were beyond their control, and perhaps their knowledge base. Thus, based on the responses of the participants, it is clear that defining the challenge can be as much of a



problem as trying to overcome the challenge. The underlying reasons for these challenges are also varied and may relate to current personal circumstance and/or previous personal or educational experiences.

The third subtheme mentioned by participants related to reading strategies. The responses of the group were fairly similar, with only 1 participant stating that she had few challenges implementing strategies in class. Participants discussed the challenges associated with implementing reading strategies while some students struggled with decoding and others could comprehend material quickly and with minimal effort; according to Kim: “There are some students that obviously come with full literacy skills, then there are some that come with very little” (Second interview). Kim also talked about expectations related to literacy skills in LINC Levels 1-3: “*There’s an expectation that students come with full literacy skills in their first language*” (Second interview). The multilevel nature of the classes and degree of first language literacy also determined the approach Jane used in a reading activity:

I know within my Level 1 to 3, I’ve got people who are really literacy level people, sometimes, among the Level 2s, I’ve got literacy level people too. So, my general approach is to try to have Level 1s and 2s because for assessing that’s what I’m going to be giving them test-wise. (First interview)

Presentation, application, and reinforcement of strategies were largely driven by the demographics of the class that varied from day to day and on some occasions even within the span of a single class (based on the early or late arrival of students). Kim spoke about the struggles involved in developing and using reading strategies:

I try to develop strategies with them, but it's difficult to get to those people who are having real difficulty just with the initial text, and then reading the questions. I mean, for them, it's a lot of text. They just see that, and I mean, it's hard for them to make meaning from it where you've got some who will look at it, and in two seconds, have it read. And they may not completely understand it as well as they think they do, but they can read it much quicker than another student who may sit there for 15 minutes just trying to read. (First interview)

Jane discussed how her instruction changed on a daily basis depending on attendance;

I try to split them into two groups when I can, so that they're a lower and higher, or occasionally, I mix them up and have a completely mixed up group of students. And then have them working together on the text. So, they're able to kind of support each other. And that way, it depends on the text and it depends on who walks in my door that day. (First interview)

When the instructors were asked what defines a good reader, they provided a fairly consistent list of strategies that were not specifically noted in their teaching plans. The strategies also reflected the needs of specific students that may be different from another instructor teaching a class at a similar level. For example, Jane, who talked about the literacy needs of some of her students, focused more on the decoding aspect of reading:

Probably somebody who is able to use phonics. That's my personal opinion. Somebody who's able to use their existing vocabulary to figure out words. They can start to break down and look at a sentence as a whole rather than stumbling upon a word. Someone who can discern meaning from the entire text, and also someone who can look for information within a sentence or within a short text

based on the question. I also think that good readers would use their highlighter or their pencil or something like this to underline a word that's difficult, make a note in the margin, or if they write in their first language, to put the L1 [first language] equivalent word or phrase on the paper within the text. So, in the future they can figure it out. There are also people doing quite well in my class who use their notebook as a mini-dictionary. So, as they're reading, and they find a new word and they're learning it, they stick it in their little notebook in columns or something similar to have a resource for their own review. (Second interview)

Amy, who was teaching Level 3, echoed these comments:

I think sometimes you do notice different strategies, different approaches. There are the students who use a dictionary quite frequently, and then, there are some who don't as much. There are some students who underline the words and will ask me and some students who won't. So yeah, I mean, there's quite a difference in what they're used to, I guess, their personalities, how they approach it.

(Second interview)

She later added the need for metacognitive skills and activation of prior knowledge:

Again, those metacognitive skills. Can you pick out the text that you need at this moment by looking at the title? How do you connect it to things in your life? What are some other questions that you have that relate to this topic? Can you think about things like that? And if my students can do all that, then that's how I would know that they have the tools to go forward. (Second interview)

Sam spoke about the importance of fluency, prosody (the rhythm, intonation and stress of speech) and making a connection between the printed and spoken word:

Fluency is very important. Apart from that, if a reader is reading, just plain reading, I think it doesn't matter. If he/she doesn't understand anything at all, then I think he/she is not reading properly. Once he/she reads and understands proper intonation, where you go up, where you come down, keeping in mind all of the commas, full stops, exclamation marks, semicolons, whatever, now you're reading. (Second interview)

Alex also focused on meaning and the skills necessary for deriving meaning, such as predicting and using context to derive the gist of a word:

Measurement of the progress is comprehension of the smallest piece of literature or text and indication that they've understood it. Secondly, that they get some pleasure or satisfaction from saying, yes, I read this, I understand it, I like this. And finally, to see the nascent skills of predicting, understanding from context, skimming—things like this, the more advanced skills. You're seeing some progression in the development of their skills. That's a good reader, someone who gives you some of those kinds of indicators. (Second interview)

Thus, while the instructors showed similar views of the essential aspects of reading, their classroom dictated their focus on specific reading skills. Amy, Jane, and Kim's plans provided some discussion of particular reading strategies. Jane described a jigsaw reading activity where the students are each responsible for a small part of the story and must work together with their classmates to understand the other parts of the story (Jane, Teaching Plan, p. 2). In Kim's plan, she included the following description of a picture story task, "predicting picture stories and placing sentences into the correct order to tell the story" (Kim, Teaching Plan, p. 1). This plan also regularly included sequencing in

reading activities and the use of sequence markers to illustrate the different parts of a text. As Amy's plan was for a higher-level LINC class (LINC Level 3), her activities were more complex. She described a reading/speaking activity where the students were asked to reflect on the genre of a story read together in class, "think of a story that is like *Aladdin and the Thousand and One Nights* from a different culture" (p.11). Thus, Amy, Jane, and Kim's plans demonstrate different approaches and focus on different skills as required by the students in these classes.

The final subtheme within the reading theme related to first language literacy problems. For some of the students in the LINC Level 1-3 classes, problems with reading are a result of gaps in the students' first-language literacy skills, which in turn become gaps in their subsequent languages. Kim spoke about the presence of students in her class who should have been placed in a literacy class based on their benchmarks in reading and writing but who were placed into LINC Level 1-3 classes based on the decisions of the assessors who determine the overall LINC Level and place clients:

There were absolutely people with literacy needs in their first language, as well as in English, but that might not be indicative of every Level 1, 2, or 3 class. Their reading and writing will continue to lag because they just don't have that—in their own language. They're not very proficient in reading and writing.

(Second interview)

Several of the participants identified that some of their students seemed to have greater needs with reading and writing and perceived pronounced gaps in their first language literacy. Alex stated:

I try to spend more time with them because I think, okay, maybe there may be a literacy issue here. One of my women from Eastern Africa, she's a very—in fact, maybe it's a national thing because three of my other students also from East Africa all seem to struggle with writing. And they seem to have not only a struggle with it, but they seem to have almost a dislike of writing. They speak fairly well. They seem to communicate well. (Second interview)

Kim mentioned similar classroom experiences with students from Eastern and Central Africa:

I've had students that whenever we would do a writing activity, they would go to the washroom or kind of start talking to their neighbour or do anything they could to avoid doing the task that was in front of them because they weren't able to do it without assistance. (First interview)

Participants questioned whether some clients had unique needs that set them apart from other clients in the LINC program. Kim stated:

Some people can just automatically make meaning on their own because they're used to reading well in their own language, and so they can just pick and go with English without any difficulty. And then other people are less experienced, less proficient readers in their first language, and they're really at the beginning. (First interview)

Jane commented how the LINC Literacy Level classes successfully bridged the gaps related to first language literacy problems: “The literacy program really meet[s] some of the needs that people who haven't received any prior education and need a more focused approach to their learning” (Second interview). Perhaps, education should not been seen

in finite terms but instead viewed as a continuum which spans from no prior education to postgraduate education, with students having different needs and expectations along this continuum.

### **Link to Research Questions**

The comments contained within these themes speak directly to my questions regarding progress within reading benchmarks for LINC Level 1-3 students. The subthemes revealed how the instructors were able to reach clients. The participants discussed problems related to reading instruction and reading activities and suggested possible reasons for them, including previous reading/ learning strategies, habits and/or experiences, and problems in first language literacy. Within this theme, the participants were able to provide insight into both the previous and current experiences of their students.

### **Assessment Expectation and Progress Themes**

The third theme identified by all of the participants was assessment and contained three subthemes: benchmark/LINC Level progress, classroom progress, and benchmark expectations. The participants were asked to discuss their assessment practices as described in their teaching plans. Some of the teaching plans provided more explicit mention of assessment than others, with a section dedicated to assessment tools. Participants were also asked about students' progress in the classroom and between benchmarks and LINC Levels. The participants commented about the expectations associated with various benchmarks as well as how they are interpreted by instructors and students. Although all of the participants talked about assessment in the first and second interview, only two of the participants explicitly mentioned assessment in their teaching

plans. Kim listed three assessment tools in her teaching plan, *On Target*, *SAM*, and teacher-made assessments, but did not refer to them in the remainder of her plan. Sam also referred to formative evaluation on a particular day in her teaching plan, but similar to Kim, she did not provide any specific details. Jane also included a list of assessment tools, *On Target*, *SAM*, CLB Can-do checklists, and teacher-produced tests/quizzes, and specified summative assessments for one week of her monthly teaching plan. However, she also did not provide any specific details about assessment plans.

The most frequently mentioned subtheme was benchmark/LINC Level progress. The participants discussed their methods of assessing their students, including formative and summative assessment. All of the participants stated that they used a combination of both formative and summative assessments for evaluating their students although this was not necessarily explicitly evident in their teaching plans. The participants uniformly stated that they combined formative assessments, including unit tests, notebooks, and dictations with summative assessments in order to create a more accurate picture of their students' learning. Kim stated:

I haven't found that [summative assessments] work so well for lower level clients, so I mean, I do use them, but I don't want to put all of my weight on those tests alone because I don't feel that they're always a true indication of someone's ability. So, I like to have other documents from over the course of the term to support whatever my— so if I'm going to progress someone, I can give them a file, and say I'm progressing them, and this is why based on this work. (First interview)



Jane talked about one of the commonly used testing materials designed by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, the Summative Assessment Manual, referred to hereafter as SAM:

It's difficult because I can't expect success with just using, for example, just the SAM as a resource. It doesn't always work for me. Whether it's the test itself is awful because I've experienced that too, like the pictures are so hard to understand what the heck it is. How can I give that to my student and expect them to succeed when I know if I give them another illustration that's clearer, and the same question and the same activity they have to do with it, task whatever, they could do it. (First interview)

Sam stated:

I feel that those four tests cannot make up for your 4 months or before, you know whatever because maybe these adults—there are different problems. Maybe they're stressed out today, or maybe they're sick today, or anything can happen, especially with these adults. They have problems with their kids. (First interview)

Alex was slightly more positive but still had some reservations about using SAM exclusively:

It works well because the areas that it measures, although very limited, include a pretty good variety of skills and competencies I think. But then, there's a lot more that they could put in there, or they could have different versions of SAMs so you'd have a lot more variety. It's just you got four narrow, little categories. But for those four categories, yeah, I think it's a good measurement. Good

measurement, but it's limited. I guess, it's narrow but deep. There's not a lot of breadth to it. (First interview)

As an alternative to structured summative assessments, Jane devised the following formula for evaluating her students:

I pull from the outcomes from each skill at each level in the LINC curriculum. I can't do everything every month. So, I'm trying to, you know, basically spiral as I go and having tasks on an ongoing basis, like small writing assessments, even a pair-work dialogue that I have the students practice and then perform in front of the group. And then, I have a rubric made up, and I just assess them that way. Those are the things that I'm implementing based on the outcomes I want my students to have. (First interview)

Several of the participants also talked about the rationale behind assessment and its implications for classroom instruction. Amy said, "It's not just for moving levels, but it's just a formal way of showing their progress, so that we all know what our goals are. It clarifies" (First interview). Jane connected assessment with student' motivation and in-class performance:

I actually think that there's a place for summative. I don't feel like it's unnecessary, I just feel like it doesn't always serve our clients' needs as a learner for those students I have in front of me. It can be motivating for those students who are up to the challenge—they like to have a test. A lot of students say they want to have a test of some kind because they like to see how they do. But I know that for some people they completely bomb it. (First interview)

She also went on to compare the different motivations of the students in her class:

I have students who have no motivation to go anywhere outside of our school, so there's reason for them to progress. It's sort of like a community centre/school for them, and I know that they really don't have any intention to, you know, work their way up through the CLBs and then out into a higher level of education. But there are those who do. So, there are students who are, you know, looking perhaps at secondary education and working in Canada, and they need the skills to do that. So, they want to go through the program, but that's very different from someone who's quite comfortable to stay here for a couple years. (First interview)

Kim also talked about motivation, personal goals and progress within the program:

Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. I mean, it comes down to personalities and goals. Some people want to get through the program and progress very, very quickly, and they just don't have the time or the patience to spend helping other people. It's just not their goal. They have a very specific goal for themselves and their family, and that drives their progress. (Second interview)

In addition to student goals and needs, progress can also be driven by administrative demands, and the personal interpretations of assessment results by individual instructors. Space in LINC classes is mandated by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) which leads to waiting lists for many classes; according to Kim: "You may have a handful move up over the course of the year to the next year, four or five. There's always pressure to move students because we have waiting lists" (First interview). In spite of the theoretical framework in the form of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs), evaluating

students is still somewhat subjective which could lead to differences of opinion between instructors. Kim also said:

It becomes hard to progress people because you can have discrepancies between the assessments of different instructors. So for example, what I say is a CLB 3, to the person who's teaching the next level, they might say "no, no, that person's not ready for my class." (First interview)

Thus, progress within the benchmarks or LINC Levels, is mitigated by a number of factors both within and beyond the instructors' control. Progress is also something that can vary from context to context making a one-size fits all approach ineffective and inappropriate.

The second subtheme referred to classroom progress on a day-to-day level (versus progress across levels). However, this type of progress also has a marked effect on progress between benchmarks and LINC Levels, thus, creating some overlap with the previous theme. Participants again discussed the importance of attendance with respect to learning and progress within the classroom. Jane stated:

It's an attendance issue. If the students don't come every day, they can't be here to learn as much as they need to perform well on any of those assessments, regardless if it's summative or formative. So, I feel like it's a bit of a patchwork situation at the moment where I'm using summative assessments because I need to, but I also feel like for a lot of my students, formative is a more accurate way to test. (First interview)

She also mentioned the fact that there are a variety of competencies to be captured to fully demonstrate learning:

There's so many factors holistically that play out within the testing scenarios to determine my students' ability on any given test on any given day, but I need to continually provide opportunities for them to show me what they can do without them sitting down with the test paper and sum up the situation. (First interview)

Kim echoed these sentiments when describing how she collects exemplars of daily work in individual portfolios to demonstrate learning:

I do do some formal assessments, but obviously, that doesn't work well for the whole group, so I mean, I try to do a lot of formative activities and take things that they do for homework or in-class activities, and I'll put them into their portfolios to just show what they have been able to do because they don't all perform well on tests. (First interview)

She also made a connection between the students' progress, their goals, and prior education: "It really sort of comes down to what their background is education-wise, and their goals for the future and that kind of thing" (Second interview). Progress and the factors mitigating progress are a product of classroom diversity, according to Alex:

So for me, I'm trying take this diverse group and kind of focus them and challenge them so the outcome is good English speakers, or at least move up to the next level. And I find there are just so many complicating factors. But that's okay, it's fascinating. But it's sometimes not as fast or efficient as you would imagine it would be. (First interview)

The students in a LINC class are heterogeneous not only in terms of their countries, languages, and immigration statuses, but also in terms of their future goals and prior education, and they carry these differences with them into the classroom. Kim

discussed her belief that LINC students need to become self-directed in order to be successful in progressing and meeting their goals:

I think out of necessity they need to become self-directed, and they need to take charge a little bit of their own needs, and trying to learn how to fulfill them to a certain point. They sort of need to be more self-aware, and I do try to encourage that kind of thinking among them, but if they don't become self-aware, I really don't know how they can progress beyond a certain point because every instructor is different and every situation is different. And if they can't advocate for themselves and recognize their abilities and then their challenges, I don't know how they can, I suppose, overcome them really. (Second interview)

Thus, the development of skills necessary for integration and self-advocacy would seem particularly important as LINC classes provide students with cultural information as well as language learning. Students should use their time in the LINC program to develop the skills they will need for their future life in this country.

The final subtheme within this theme referred to benchmark expectations. This included not only the discrete descriptors for each language skill within specific benchmarks, but also the interpretations of these descriptors by different instructors, as well as the designated correspondence grid between the CLBs and the LINC Levels which is rather convoluted (see figure 1, p. 3). Although the CLBs provide a detailed description of language outcomes for each of the language skills across the various benchmark levels, students do not necessarily demonstrate all of the outcomes described. In fact, a student must only master 80% of the outcomes in any given skill to achieve a

specific benchmark (CCLB, 2000). Which outcomes constitute the 80% can vary across students, creating differing student profiles; according to Jane:

No, the problem really is that I can't expect certain things necessarily from a learner who is labelled 1, 2, or 3 in certain skills. There's a general sense of what this learner can do and has the skill to learn to do. And that's sort of what you're working with is a general sense of that. There are certain basics that learners must have. (Second interview)

Uncertainty among instructors can become problematic when they are communicating about students and/or making decisions about progressing students; according to Jane:

The expectations of the teacher at the next level are higher than what I feel it should be. There was an issue about a year and a bit ago with us. We had a conversation, and it was really about progressing a student into benchmark 3. And say the student is Level 3 now; it doesn't mean he/she is accomplishing Level 3 tasks. It means he/she has finished 80% of the Level 2 expectations—he/she has achieved these things. He/she is working towards a Level 3. But when he/she entered the class, because it was a 3, 4, 5 in the afternoon, he/she is completely drowning. Because the way the teaching was happening, the way the dynamics of the classroom were working, the student felt, "No way. No way. I'm not a Level 3. How can I do this?" (Second interview)

Jane described how this uncertainty can affect the learners in her class:

You don't want to lose a person. And you need the students to understand what a Level 3 person is really supposed to be able to do. That's something that I have to

very carefully explain to the students as best I can and have them try to understand our system. It's still kind of foggy sometimes. (Second interview)

Amy described her own struggle to understand the benchmark system:

This is a bit confusing because they're actually going to make this more clear in their revised CLB document, but if you are in LINC Level 3, you are working towards completing CLB 3, so when you leave my class, you would have done those things right on my poster there confidently, and then you have your CLB 3. (Second interview)

Thus, the expectations created by the outcomes described within the benchmarks are problematic for instructors and students alike. The students struggle to understand their place within the benchmarks while the instructors have difficulty agreeing on how to interpret the benchmarks as a mean of progressing clients.

### **Link to Research Questions**

The research questions were focused specifically on the progress of students with respect to reading. Progress is based upon an assessment of skills, so it should be no surprise that the participants raised subthemes related to classroom progress, benchmark progress, and benchmark expectations. The dialogue led to discussions surrounding how progress is measured and the perceived accuracy and relevance of assessment. The participants raised considerations needed to implement assessment and the limitations of assessment. This theme also demonstrated a divergence of opinion between the instructors about their understanding of and interpretation of assessment.



## Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, the demographic questionnaire, and the teaching artifacts. Comparative and contrastive case analysis yielded three primary themes each with a number of subthemes. The first theme, client/instructor backgrounds and classroom needs themes, contained eight subthemes: class size, mixed-levels, client backgrounds/goals/needs, administrative/volunteer/peer support, skill development, continuous intake and attendance, instructors' undergraduate backgrounds/TESL training, and instructor needs. These themes described the classroom experiences and needs of the LINC clients and instructors. While the participants were not asked directly to discuss their backgrounds and/or their classroom needs, these areas mirror questions that they were asked to consider concerning clients' backgrounds. Thus, these reflections seem to be an extension of the instructors' reflections about their clients' experiences. The second theme, reading strategies, methods, and challenges themes, contained four subthemes: reading strategies, instructional methods, reading challenges in class, and first language literacy problems. These themes focused specifically on reading instruction, reading as a skill, and the challenges experienced in the classroom. The third theme, assessment expectations and progress themes, contained three subthemes: classroom progress, benchmark/LINC Level progression, and benchmark expectations. This theme included not only client progress as well as but also the instructors' and clients' understandings of the benchmarks. Thus, this study revealed the participants' perceptions regarding their reading instruction and reading difficulties within their classrooms, both expected and unexpected. In the next chapter, the findings will be discussed and compared with the literature review.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS**

The purpose of this inquiry was to investigate LINC instructors' perceptions of their reading instruction and reading difficulties among their LINC Level 1-3 clients. The study was conducted using a case study (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yan, 2003), situated within a constructivist and critical framework. As the purpose of chapter 4 was to present the findings associated with this study, chapter 5 will analyze the findings from a critical perspective in order to make connections with relevant literature, discuss underlying issues associated with the themes identified in the data, and provide implications for future research in this area.

### **Summary of Study**

Newcomers to Canada who participate in classroom-based, government-sponsored LINC classes to acquire English language skills in a settlement context (i.e., instruction aimed at helping newcomers acclimatize to their new community and services available to them combined with survival English for daily life) are assessed using the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs) to establish English proficiency. Placement into an appropriate LINC class is based on English proficiency along with access to any additional services required including transportation and child-minding assistance. While LINC assessors collect some cursory information about clients' backgrounds prior to placement in LINC classes, this information has little influence on the placement of clients and is not directly transmitted to LINC instructors. Thus, placement of clients is based essentially on the basis of English language proficiency with little consideration for clients' prior background. As LINC clients may be immigrants or refugees, there is a great deal of variation in their backgrounds and circumstances. Some may have fled

persecution, war zones, or experienced prolonged existence in refugee camps or displacement to another country. Such experiences have a profound effect on access to and completion of education (CCVT, 2004; CIC, 2009). Placing clients based on English-language proficiency alone does not allow for the consideration of individual differences in clients' previous education, which affects their current needs and goals. This can lead to a class with very divergent needs, particularly if clients' previous education was interrupted, leading to gaps in clients' first language literacy skills. As a result, clients with little education can be placed in classes with clients with much more education (but with similar levels of English proficiency). Their needs and goals can also be quite different making instructional planning challenging.

Data gathered from LINC instructors allowed me to explore and understand the nature of reading instruction and clients' reading difficulties in context of LINC Levels 1-3 classes. Connections between evidence-based methods described in the literature and participants' practices were also made, with corresponding suggestions for improving reading instruction. The research questions addressed were:

1. Does the reading instruction of these instructors reflect evidence-based practices?
2. Why do some clients fail to progress through the LINC reading benchmark levels as expected?
3. How do the previous educational and life experiences of LINC clients in LINC Level 1-3 classes relate to their experiences in the LINC program and contribute to progress that is slower than expected?
4. How does the instructors' understanding of the learners' previous educational experiences provide insight into clients' progress in the LINC program?

A case study (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003) approach was used to collect the instructors' experiences. A constructivist perspective influenced the methodology of this study, as the intent was to gain an understanding across the five participants (including myself) with respect to their reading instruction and perceptions of clients' reading difficulties in LINC Level 1-3 classes.

The analysis of interview data, teaching plans, and field study notes revealed three primary themes, each with several subthemes. The majority of subthemes arose directly from the research questions. Two of the subthemes, however, arose from two of the five participants who provided unexpected comments about their needs as developing professionals.

### **Review of Themes**

The first theme, "client/instructor backgrounds and classroom needs," described instructors' and clients' background and classroom needs and instructors' corresponding responses. This theme contained eight subthemes, including: class size, mixed levels, client background, goals and needs, administrative/volunteer/ peer support, skill development, continuous intake and assessment, instructors' undergraduate backgrounds/TESL training, and instructor needs. Although participants referred to their clients' and their own previous experiences and backgrounds briefly, their comments largely related to issues of classroom management, such as attendance, mixed levels, class size, and continuous intake. The comments related to clients' previous personal experiences suggested a primarily negative influence on student progress. The themes of instructors' undergraduate backgrounds/TESL training and instructor needs were unexpectedly raised by some of the participants to articulate their experiences.

The second theme, “reading strategies, methods, and challenges,” described reading instruction and any associated challenges faced by instructors. This theme contained four subthemes: reading strategies, instructional methods, classroom-based reading challenges, and first language literacy problems. The participants provided possible explanations for their clients’ reading challenges which also provided additional insights into clients’ previous and current experiences as students.

The third theme, “assessment expectations and progress,” described clients’ progress with the classroom, benchmarks, and LINC levels. Participants also included some discussion about how the individual instructors’ interpretations of the benchmarks and LINC level might differ from the expectations associated with the actual benchmarks and LINC levels. This theme included three subthemes: classroom progress, benchmark/LINC level progression, and benchmark expectations. The participants raised concerns about how clients’ progress is assessed as well as the role, relevance, and accuracy of assessment in LINC Level 1-3 classrooms.

The themes identified in this study demonstrated the varied perceptions of the five participants with respect to reading instruction and reading difficulties in LINC Levels 1-3. The interviews provided rich descriptions of the experiences of these participants. In combination with the demographic questionnaire, teaching artifacts, field study notes, and member-checking process, they were used to create a picture of reading instruction and reading difficulties in LINC Level 1-3 classrooms as experienced across the five participants.

## **Discussion**

Throughout the study, the participants shared their unique perspectives about their reading instruction and clients' reading difficulties in LINC Levels 1-3 classes. Their perceptions were influenced by the individual circumstance of their settings, their backgrounds, as well as the backgrounds of their clients, and the framework of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs). A comparison of the data analysis and the relevant literature on reading instruction and reading difficulties in LINC Level 1-3 classes revealed some interesting parallels, as well as some interesting dissimilarities. This section will make connections between the results of this study and the previous research discussed in chapter 2.

The points of discussion generally are categorized into three separate areas of knowledge. The first area concerns the more theoretical principles of instruction, instructional planning, and assessment, including adult education and communicative/task-based learning approaches. The second area relates more specifically to the backgrounds, needs, and goals of the LINC clients. The final area focuses on evidence-based reading instruction, how these practices are implemented, and the familiarity of instructors with these practices and the ability to determine and address reading difficulties in the classroom.

### **Theoretical Principles**

The principles of adult education advocate the use of the personal experiences to frame instruction for adults (Brookfield, 1995, 2006; Giroux, 1997; Merriam et al., 2007; Pratt, 1998). The participants all spoke at some length about how they incorporated their knowledge of their clients' life experiences into their classroom instruction. For some of

the participants this occurred on an ad hoc basis in response to an immediate instructional challenge, while others made direct efforts to assess their clients' needs and goals and integrate this knowledge into their instructional planning. Several participants spoke about how the arrival or departure of clients would cause them to change the direction of their lesson and/or class, sometimes spontaneously.

The literature on adult education provides support for learning that is shaped by adult life and societal experiences (Brookfield, 1995, 2006; Merriam et al., 2007). The life experiences of some LINC clients may be quite different from others in the LINC program or even in the same class. By integrating these experiences, the clients and instructors can find ways to engage with one another through a shared understanding of each other's experiences. A universalist approach marginalizes learners who have needs that are different from that of the majority (Brookfield, 1995, 2006; Merriam et al., 2007; Pratt, 1998). Merriam and Caffarella (1999) stated that effective instruction requires the use of multiple instructional methods and materials. Brookfield (2006) also stated that although learners' prior experiences may be at the centre of learning, these experiences are not neutral and must be viewed through a critical lens. Van Oers et al. (2008) recommended viewing clients as whole individuals so that their cultural perspective and cultural-historical setting could be included into their learner profiles.

The CLBs (CCLB, 2000), which are the theoretical framework for assessing progress in LINC classes, are based upon a learner-centred and task-based approach. The predominant instructional method employed in LINC classes is the Communicative/Task-based approach which not only corresponds well with the focus on the completion of authentic tasks in the CLBs, but also with the learner-centred approach of adult education

practices. The participants noted a number of issues related to use of this framework both in terms of instructional and assessment practices. Some of the participants self-identified while others were identified by researcher as not having a firm understanding of how the CLBs correspond to the LINC levels and what benchmarks constituted certain LINC levels. A lack of understanding about the benchmarks within LINC levels can have profound consequences for progress within a LINC class or between LINC levels, particularly above LINC Level 2 where the CLB distribution becomes skewed between different language skills. The majority of participants also reflected on problems surrounding assessment using the CLBs, citing problems such as an overemphasis on the importance of summative assessment, the ineffectiveness of summative assessment tools for assessing some clients, the subjectivity in interpreting assessment results, and differences of opinion between instructors arising from different understandings of the same summative tools.

While some type of theoretical framework is necessary for conceptualizing learning and assessment, Brookfield (2006) cautioned against idealizing a particular framework as a perfect or universal model for reaching all students with a “one-size-fits-all” approach that does not include individualized instruction and consideration of gender and/or culture. Freire (1985) stated that assessment should not be used as an inspection of learning, but rather that formative assessment be used as an evaluation of experience. This allows for a more accurate depiction of what learning has occurred in the classroom. In fact, many of the participants mentioned using formative assessments in order to gain a holistic view of their clients’ progress. These participants used the combination of formative and summative assessments to build a bridge between the “low-stakes”



everyday progress and the “higher-stakes” term progress that was required by funders. This approach, however, was not universal among all of the participants, with one of the participants relying solely on summative assessments. Finally, one participant indicated that attendance was a significant factor in her clients’ ability to perform well on assessments, consistent with the findings of Bogdan (1995) who concluded that of all the various factors that might affect progress, attendance was the most influential one.

The sharing of experiences can lead to collaboration between individuals within the group. This collaboration may exist between instructors and clients, teachers’ assistants and clients, and/or volunteers and clients. Alternatively, such collaborations can exist between clients themselves, creating a kind of collective effort to propel the group forward. All of the participants spoke about the role of collaboration in their teaching. For some, it involved collaboration among clients and between colleagues and/or volunteers in addition to collaboration between themselves and their clients. The rationale for adopting collaboration varied among participants and included problem-solving for instructional planning, facilitating instruction, monitoring and managing instruction and class sizes, and addressing clients’ needs. Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) described the relationship between the teacher and learner where the collaboration process facilitates learners operating slightly beyond their current ability with the assistance of their instructor who mediates and scaffolds learning.

Shayer (2002) and Donato (1994) expanded the role of collaboration to a language learning context, stating that the collective efforts of the students within the classroom create a peer-based ZPD. All of the participants employed some version of a peer-based ZPD in their classrooms although their underlying rationales differed. One of

the participants with smaller classes paired clients in “expert-novice” dyads in order to scaffold their learning. The other instructor with a smaller class did not specifically employ collaborative methods but did describe some occurrences of collaboration between expert and novice student pairs that occurred spontaneously within the classroom. The other three participants had much larger classes and viewed the peer collaboration of clients as essential to managing class tasks. This collaboration sometimes involved “expert-novice” pairs while at other times it involved pairs of similar ability. Using collaborative learning approaches allowed these participants to better meet the needs of their clients when they were not in a position to provide more individualized instruction due to large class size and clients’ varied needs.

### **Backgrounds, Goals, and Needs of LINC Clients**

The participants reported having quite differing levels of knowledge about their clients’ personal and educational backgrounds. Some of the participants were content with the amount of information they received and/or were able to complete further needs assessments (although this did not always lead to clarity about clients’ specific needs or goals). The remaining participants believed that the amount of information they received about new clients was inadequate, particularly in view of the fact the new clients could enter their classrooms at any time, often without warning.

Giroux (1997) stated that we must consider the individual perspectives and backgrounds of learners. TESOL (2000) identified a list of key factors that should be identified when working with English language learners. This list included: languages spoken, country of origin, language of previous schooling, written literacy levels in first and subsequent languages, as well as external factors such as famine and natural

disasters. Burt et al. (2003) similarly identified a list of factors including age, motivation to read, home/work/educational environment, sociocultural/socioeconomic background, and abilities/disabilities. Awareness of this kind of information can assist in the correct assessment and placement of clients as well as planning and facilitating their instruction for their clients' needs. In the case of some LINC clients, their life circumstances before reaching Canada may have been so dire that they experience difficulty adjusting to their new life in Canada (CCVT, 2004). According to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, higher order needs may only be achieved once an individual has first achieved the lower order needs. Accordingly, some learners may remain trapped at the level of the most basic needs, which will likely affect their ability to make progress in a language classroom.

Participants also described a number of issues associated with the concept of "progress" either in terms of benchmarks or LINC levels. The participants described how some of their clients failed to make progress at the same pace as their fellow classmates. Some of these clients, in fact, made very protracted progress and remained at the same level with the same benchmarks in some of their skills for years. In order to overcome this challenge, some of the instructors indicated that they were able to make connections to clients' previous experiences and attempt different methods of instruction. Some of the less experienced instructors however, appeared less able to recognize the cause of clients' learning challenges and implement effective interventions.

According to the CCLB (2005), many learners require more than six months to progress by a full benchmark. Klassen and Burnaby (1993) found that learners required two to seven years to develop fluency in a second or subsequent language under the most

ideal circumstances. A study conducted by CIC (2009) found that there was a connection between immigration status and progress. This study found that refugees required 70-80 more hours of instruction to progress to the next benchmark. These increased instructional hours also need to be considered in context of growing numbers of refugees (CIC, 2009) and clients with limited literacy skills (Burnaby et al., 2003). A study conducted by Statistics Canada (2008) found that the number of permanent residents with less than nine years of education has doubled between 1999 and 2008. Watt and Lake (2004) demonstrated that learners' progress is highly variable and that a number of factors impacted their progress. They found that the number of years of prior education had the strongest correlation with progress. Learners with less than seven years of education showed only a 0.4% increase following 250 hours of instruction. Wrigley et al. (2009) also found a strong correlation between the number of years of prior education and the level of proficiency in English as a second language. They found that oral proficiency in English and prior schooling provided a wider range of future opportunities for learners. In contrast, Alderson (1984), Carrell (1991), and Tan et al. (1994) found that proficiency in English was a better indicator of progress than educational background in learners with low oral proficiencies.

Several of the participants stated that their clients presented a range of proficiencies across the four language skills, with the listening and speaking proficiencies being one or more benchmarks higher than the reading and writing proficiencies. Some of the participants also identified a substantial discrepancy between the listening and speaking benchmarks and the reading and writing benchmarks as a potential flag for literacy difficulties in their clients. Schmid (2009) commented about the variable nature

of proficiency among adult learners from the perspective of their English achievement implying that the results between client in the same class or program will be quite different. Burnaby (1989, 1991) and Klassen and Burnaby (1993) also pointed out that a range listening and speaking proficiencies alone do not predict full literacy skills. Consistent with the existing literature indicated a correlation between the number of years of education and literacy skills, most of the participants in this study made a positive connection between the number of years of clients' prior education and the clients' level of literacy skills. Of the five participants in this study, only one taught a mixed-level class that included LINC Phase III literacy. The remaining participants taught classes that were LINC Level 1 or higher, with a meaning that the focus on improving literacy skills rather than establishing literacy skills. UNESCO-ECLAC (2010) found that the number of years of education correlated to literacy levels, with greater years of education correlating with higher literacy levels. Infante (2000) similarly examined the number of years of clients' prior education and literacy level and found that seven years or less of education indicated only basic literacy skills while 12 or more years indicated strong literacy skills. She found that less than 12 years likely indicated literacy problems. This is increasingly important in light of the results of a study conducted by Statistics Canada (2008) indicating that the number of permanent residents in Canada with less than nine years of education has doubled between 1999 and 2008.

Some of the participants commented that some of their clients originated from cultures that do not require or perhaps place importance on the acquisition of literacy skills. This is consistent with Freire's (1985; 1993) belief that illiteracy (or low literacy) may occur through choice, denial of opportunity, or belonging to a profession or culture

that does not value literacy. UNESCO-ECLAC (2010) found that economic status may limit access to education and a lack of school or disruption in schooling may be the result of war, famine, or displacement. Many of the participants also established connections between a lack of literacy skills and how their clients struggled to acclimatize to life in Canada. UNESCO similarly discussed the effect of literacy on the ability to adapt and flourish in a new country. Initial weak literacy skills (and their underlying factors) can have a profound effect both on learning and progress within a classroom.

Four of the five participants were instructors of mixed-levels classes, which is greater than the statistics reported by Jangles Productions (2006) that indicated 70% of LINC classes were multilevel classes. Of the four participants working with mixed-level classes, only 1 had a class that included one of the phases of literacy instruction, namely LINC Phase III Literacy, despite four of the five participants specifically stating that they had clients with literacy needs in their classrooms. Thus, clients with literacy needs are not confined to literacy level classes. Jangles Productions also found that most immigrants and refugees with low literacy needs attended regular versus literacy-specific classes and proposed the idea of case management for addressing clients' needs. Jangles Productions also suggested that the definition of literacy should be reconsidered to include a number of key factors such as first language literacy, oral proficiency in English, educational background, goals for learning English, and transfer between the first and second/subsequent language. A case management system incorporating a broader definition of literacy would involve collecting greater amounts of assessment and background information that could be used by the participants to plan and facilitate instruction to better meet the needs of all clients.

Although the participants identified a number of challenges associated with mixed-level classes, only one participant spoke strongly against them. The other participants were less critical and, in some cases, noted some potential benefits of mixed-level classes (e.g., collaboration with higher proficiency clients and exposure to more proficient levels of English). This is in stark contrast to the finding of Beder and Medina (2001), Kruidenier (2002), and McShane (2005) who found that multilevel classes were barriers to instruction. Verma (2004) specifically spoke about the need to separate literacy learners and mainstream LINC learners.

Several of the participants commented about the challenges associated with meeting the needs of their students on a daily basis which is consistent with the research of Condelli, Wrigley, and Yoon (2008) and Wrigley (2008), who found that low-literacy learners' needs were not met in conventional classes. They stated that a one-size-fits-all approach to education does not work well for learners' with low-literacy skills (or arguably any other learner). Millar (2007) concurred and stated that low literacy learners do not have the skills required to manage in ESL classes. This point was confirmed by the participants of this study who identified the clients' lack of relevant learning strategies and skills as well as other challenges (e.g., undiagnosed learning disabilities, previous education that has been interrupted, lack of classroom-based learning experiences) that prevented the progress of their clients and affected their ability to plan effectively for instruction and assessment. In addition, the participants described external barriers that also interfered with their clients' learning, including employment and family responsibilities. Beder and Medina (2001), Kruidenier (2002), and McShane (2005) also found that factors such as employment, attendance, and family responsibilities were

significant barriers to instruction. Burnaby (1989) also identified learners with low education and low literacy skills as at risk in LINC classrooms.

Bogdan (1995), Burnaby (1989), and Wrigley (2008) proposed the simultaneous teaching of the learners' first language and the second/subsequent language as a way of meeting the needs of such learners. The Ontario Literacy Coalition (2007), however, stated there is insufficient evidence for the simultaneous teaching of first and second/subsequent languages. However, it did acknowledge that first language literacy problems compound the difficulty of second/subsequent learning. The implementation of first and subsequent language teaching was not raised by any of participants in this study, although they did comment about the negative impact of low first-language literacy skills on clients' learning and progress. Indeed, some of the participants' comments could be conceived as marginalizing their clients and indicative of an incomplete understanding of their clients. Specifically, some of their comments demonstrated a stereotypical view of clients that failed to make connections between the clients' experiences, culture and motivation. For instance, one participant attributed differences in a client's performance to cultural differences without considering individual differences (Kim, field study notes, p. 2). Such thinking can be a barrier to creating and providing effective instruction. If instructors are not able to look beyond their own western-based training and experiences, they will be unlikely to create classroom environments where power and expertise are shared between instructors and clients.

Clients' goals and motivation also figured prominently in the participants' discussions. The participants verified the importance of identifying and communicating goals as part of achieving them. Many of the participants commented that their clients were



not always aware of the LINC specified learning goals, and may have perceived that their clients had goals that were overly ambitious or alternatively lacked ambition. A lack of clarity about short and/or long term goals impacted the motivation of some learners. Gillette (1994) found that the initial intrinsic motivation of learners coloured their behaviour and ultimately their language learning efforts. Goals and motivation represent only a small part of the learners' experiences and it is important to consider the learners' complete background. McShane (2005) presented the concept of learner awareness, which reinforces the idea of using learner profiles where all relevant background information is compiled into a single document.

### **Evidence-Based Reading Instruction**

The participants described the difficulties they faced in terms of providing reading instruction that accommodated for clients' poor first language reading skills, inexperience with text, inability or lack of motivation to read, and large class sizes, which made one-on-one instruction difficult and/or impossible. In some cases, the participants were able to recognize the source of the challenge and attempted to address it. For others, the source of the challenge was either too complex or outside the experience of the instructor, and as a result, the instructor was unable to make meaningful interventions. Grabe and Stoller (2002) found that educational background was an important factor in determining reading proficiency. Furthermore, they found that first language literacy affects the transfer of reading skills from the first language to the second/subsequent language. Robson (1982), and Strucker (2002) and Grabe and Stoller agreed that it was vital to establish first language literacy prior to instruction. Both Robson and Strucker also found that the first language can influence reading acquisition in second/subsequent languages.

As it is challenging and ineffective for LINC instructors to determine clients' first language literacy skills in class (i.e., due to lack of expertise, large class size, and lack of administrative/ volunteer support), it is critical that these skills be assessed prior to placement in LINC classes by the LINC assessors.

When participants were asked to define a good reader and discuss their lesson plans, the participants reflected upon reading strategies that were largely congruent with those the major components of reading as defined by the Reading Research Working Group (RRWG, Kruidenier, 2002). These components included phonemic awareness and decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, all of which are essential for reading ability. Although the participants cited these components, they also talked about their inability to spend time on each of them. One of the participants, specifically, cited a lack of expertise in teaching reading and a desire to gain more experience in this area. In fact, the data collected from this participant indicated a reliance on instructing clients to use contextual cues as a strategy for reading that has been demonstrated to be a characteristic of poor readers (Catts & Kamhi, 2005).

Kruidenier (2002) and McShane (2005) stated that orthographic and phonological knowledge should be explicitly taught to improve reading. This approach however, was not demonstrated in the participants' descriptions of practice. In fact, many of the features of effective instruction including explicit instruction, explanation of purpose, strategy instruction scaffolding, support leading to self-direction, intensive instruction, and segmenting instruction were not always evident in the participants' responses (McShane, 2005; NRP, 2000). More positively, the participants spoke at length about the concepts of metacognition and internalizing language. They noted that an ability to

internalize a language and its rules, as well as the ability to reflect on language learning and development were important aspects of learning. Ellis (2000) stated that it was important for learners to internalize language through interactions that were mediated and scaffolded. Zimmerman (1997) found that balancing skills through a blending of old and new information was required to avoid fossilization. Gillette (1994) found that success in the development of reading was synonymous with the use of metacognitive strategies. Turuk (2002) and Williams and Burden (1997) similarly discovered that metacognitive skills transform learning.

The participants also spoke about the methods they used for organizing their clients into groups for reading activities. Some used pairs or small groups with strong and weak readers grouped together while others used larger groups. The groupings were often dependent upon the support of either a volunteer or teaching assistant being present in the class for reading activities. The instructors created support systems between themselves and the clients, among clients, or between volunteers/teaching assistants and the clients in order to facilitate the completion of reading tasks. This process matches Joe's (1998) and Krashen and Terrell's (1983) view of comprehensible input and mirrors Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, where learners are able to function at higher level through collaboration with an expert or more experienced individual. While most participants were able to provide such pairing opportunities, the process appeared more difficult in larger LINC classes where there was greater variability across clients' skill levels. If an extreme range of proficiencies exists within a group, effective groupings where clients are challenged but still within an acceptable range of their current level of production could be difficult to create and monitor. If there are clients with literacy needs in their

first language, the process of creating appropriate groupings could be even more challenging.

### **Implications**

Following a comparison of the results of this study and an examination of the existing literature, five topics arose for additional discussion. First, LINC instructors require more information about client backgrounds and needs, and this information needs to be transmitted into a format that is easily interpreted by instructors. Currently, the available information is primarily limited to the Automated Reservation System (ARS) or History of Assessments, Referrals and Training System (HARTS) client management systems which the instructors access outside of classroom hours (typically on their own time). The client information should also be expanded to include goal setting including short and long-term goals. The use of a client profile or case management system may, however, be impractical and/or challenging to implement, in spite of its many potential benefits, as the LINC program provides instructors with little or no paid time for instructional planning or administrative duties.

Second, it was also clear from the interview data that instructors were not completely comfortable with the use of some of the available summative assessment tools. Some of the instructors lacked clarity about the correspondence between the CLBs and the individual LINC levels. It would seem that more professional development on a program level, as well as at the individual provider level is required here. The expectations of progress between benchmarks and LINC Levels must also be reviewed to reflect the time required by different learners to demonstrate progress, particularly in reading. Such professional development training could also be used to provide an

opportunity for greater dialogue between the CCLB, CIC, and LINC providers, assessors, and instructors about the understanding, experiences, and expectations of these different client groups, as well as a discussion about the role of assessment in placing and progressing LINC clients. The current tools do not seem to be fully effective for all clients, justifying the refinement of existing tools and development of new ones to assist in the placement and evaluation of clients.

The initial and on-going training of LINC instructors should be expanded to include different client profiles, so that instructors are better prepared to provide instruction for different types of learners. The instructors' comments demonstrated several areas that need to be addressed through further training. First, the CLBs and LINC documents are designed to continually spiral the curriculum. Only one of the participants described her instruction in these terms, which could mean that instructors are not adequately prepared to successfully implement the spiralling curriculum. Furthermore, instructors' responses showed a varied understanding and implementation of techniques for differentiated instruction. A lack of training and experience in differentiating instruction on the part of LINC instructors might be part of the reason that clients do not progress through the reading benchmarks as expected. Second, the responses also demonstrated that some of the LINC instructors were marginalizing their own clients by attributing client differences simply to cultural differences without seeking underlying explanations or methods of overcoming these differences. Some of the participants were unable to extend their view beyond a western educational model to understand or explain their clients' abilities and/or needs. Education alone is not sufficient to empower individuals (Freire, 1985). In order for individuals to be

empowered, the instruction must reflect their specific needs, allow them to participate fully, and take a critical stance toward the underlying political and social forces. The current professional development requirements of LINC instructors to remain in good standing with certifying body TESL Ontario are quite minimal, five hours annually (TESL Ontario, 2001c) and not necessarily designed to ensure that instructors received professional development that suits their instructional needs. Instructors need to be given a voice where they can express their professional development needs to LINC administrators, assessors, TESL Ontario and Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Third, the LINC instructors interviewed here mentioned the need for classroom assistance in the form of volunteers or teaching assistants. Large class sizes prevented these instructors from providing individualized instruction. More positively, large class sizes also required instructors to employ collaborative methods where the students supported each other's learning. While these methods are conducive to an andragogical approach, their use underscored instructors' struggle to meet their clients' needs on a daily basis and meet with them individually on a regular basis. Smaller classes, or alternatively classes with more teaching assistant/volunteer support would allow for increased individualized instruction and better support the needs of individual clients. The data from this study showed that class sizes were highly variable and that the workload of some LINC instructors was quite disproportionate to other LINC instructors. Workload conditions need to be addressed at a program level by LINC providers and Citizenship and Immigration Canada as part of annual contract negotiations. A more effective distribution of clients across providers within cities could improve the workload of some LINC instructors and provide LINC clients with better instructor/client ratios.

Another related recommendation is to create structures and processes regarding the roles, uses and training of volunteers or teaching assistants in LINC classrooms in order to maximize their efficacy in the classroom.

Fourth, the data from this particular study were inconclusive about the effects of mixed-level classes. However, it was clear that having clients with literacy needs in non-literacy classes placed stress on both the clients and instructors. Clients should be screened carefully during the placement process, with as much background information as possible being considered to determine whether they have literacy needs. Background information should include years of previous education, language of previous education, interruptions in education, first language and other languages spoken, written literacy level in first and second language, immigration status as it relates to personal circumstances in Canada, and the clients' family responsibilities and general health (Jangles Productions, 2006; TESOL, 2000; UNESCO-ECLAC, 2010).

Literacy clients should then be placed into the appropriate literacy level class. The LINC program contains four literacy levels, although the Foundation level was not existent and Phase III literacy existed within only 1 participant's institution, limiting these placements as a valid option for clients with literacy needs in other LINC classes. Implementing all four phases of literacy as placement options in practice (rather than simply in theory) will help ensure that clients are placed appropriately versus into mainstream classes, which do not meet their needs.

Finally, the participants could all benefit from professional development around evidence-based instructional practices in reading. At times the instructors' descriptions of instruction were at odds with their own definitions of a good reader and the effective

practices as described in the reading literature. Ideally, professional development programs would be delivered by professionals with experience in evidence-based practices and instruction in LINC settings. Professional development should involve instructors at all LINC levels versus being restricted to those involved in LINC Literacy Levels, as research, including this study, has shown that clients with literacy needs can be found across LINC Levels. This could be done through ongoing on-site professional development sessions or collaborative planning sessions between instructors.

### **Limitations**

This study presents the beliefs and perceptions of five LINC instructors, including myself, rather than the LINC clients due to a number of factors that made obtaining data directly from the clients challenging. First, in order to ensure that LINC clients fully understood the informed consent process and interview protocols, interpreters and translators would be needed. Costs associated with hiring such interpreters and translators would have been prohibitively expensive as many languages are represented in the LINC classes, including less commonly used languages such as Amharic, Tigrinya, Somali, Aramaic, and Rumanian. Second, the use of interpreters and translators may have compromised clients' feelings of confidentiality, rapport with me, and standing in their community, especially if the translator or interpreter is a known member of that community. Additionally, using such individuals to mediate data collection may also affect the confidentiality of their responses, especially if they were concerned about losing face. Third, I was concerned about unduly raising the expectations of clients with respect to the study results leading to immediate tangible changes in their classes.



Based on all of these concerns, I chose to speak directly to LINC instructors who work in close proximity with LINC clients on a daily basis. By working with the LINC instructors, insights were gained about the challenges faced by both LINC clients and instructors. Some of these challenges represented personal challenges (e.g., family responsibilities, attendance problems, a lack of focus or motivation) while others represented systemic issues (e.g., large classes, mixed levels, inadequate planning and preparation time). LINC instructors were able to provide a more complete understanding of the LINC program and provide a broader view of what occurs in the classroom from the perspective of their clients and themselves.

The interview protocol was designed to allow the participants to provide narrative accounts of their classroom experiences, including any insight about their clients' backgrounds and previous educational experiences. The purpose of collecting these narratives was to create a case study, with comparative and contrastive analysis of the participants' responses. However, the nature of the interview questions may have, in some instances, limited the amount of reflection by the participants and ultimately led to a case study that was not as rich or indicative of practice as the instructors' reality. Thus, the case study may have been somewhat superficial with other issues remaining beneath the responses of participants that were not raised due to the fact that the research questions solely on reading instruction and reading difficulties.

In designing the study, I imposed the boundary of working with instructors from LINC Levels 1-3. Based on my first hand experiences, I believed that the specialized approach of the LINC Literacy Level classes represented a natural boundary for the lower proficiency clients and, thus, chose to look at instructors in LINC Level 1 or higher. The

rationale behind selecting LINC Level 3 as the end point was more complex. Based on my experiences in the LINC program, I found that some clients exited the LINC program following LINC Level 3 when they had adequate proficiency for entry-level employment and/or based on frustration at a lack of progress in reading and writing skills. As these boundaries are largely arbitrary, there may instructors from the Literacy Level or LINC Level 4 or higher classes who may also have perceptions relevant to the research questions posed in this study. Future research might consider wider boundaries with data being collected from LINC clients as well as LINC instructors.

In this study, I also acted as one of the participants based on having spent several years teaching in LINC Level 1-3 classes. By participating in the study, any subjectivity on my part was reduced by having an opportunity to share my opinions and also by having these opinions contrasted against those of the other participants. My experiences needed be reframed in order to accommodate the experiences of the other participants, thus blurring the distinction between research and participant at times:

Researchers are not “tabula rasa”—blank slates without any assumptions but, like the other participants, they come with their own backpack of preconceived ideas, usually rooted in their experiences and culture. The self is always an integral part of any study. Writing the self into the research is only the beginning, not its end nor its purpose. Ultimately, “moving beyond oneself” is demanded of the qualitative researcher. (Holloway & Biley, 2011, p. 971)

In this case, I, as a fellow LINC instructor, was not an outsider and vacillated between both roles (Sciarra, 1999).

Recruitment for this study was carried out through a posting on the website of the provincial certifying body for LINC instructors and my local affiliate. The resulting participants were not very diverse in terms of geographic areas, suggesting that an alternate approach, such as using listserv to reach a broader cross section of LINC instructors might be beneficial. Similarly, as LINC instructors complete a great deal of uncompensated work on their own time, it is possible that some potential participants did not have sufficient time or were reluctant to allocate personal time to participate in this study. I have considered petitioning TESL Ontario, the certifying body for LINC instructors, to include participation in research as eligible for meeting annual professional development requirements for certification. Such an agreement might generate more interest among LINC instructors and inspire greater participation in research conducted about the LINC program.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The results of this study have created a number of questions for future research. The results related to class size and mixed-level classes were ultimately inconclusive. Further research should re-examine these issues using a larger sample size involving participants from different sites in order to determine whether either or both of these themes have a significant effect on learner progress in LINC classes. Such findings might also provide stronger evidence for the argument that many literacy learners are placed into mainstream LINC classes which are inappropriate for their needs and that these learners should be streamed into literacy-specific classes. A comparison study might also be conducted to evaluate the progress of literacy learners in LINC literacy classes versus those who are placed into mainstream LINC classes. Such an examination

could demonstrate both the qualitative and quantitative differences between the LINC literacy classes and the mainstream LINC classes.

This study was restricted to examining the perceptions of LINC instructors. Future research should seek to include a broader range of perspectives. This could include interviews with LINC clients with literacy needs and direct observations of these clients in their learning context as this study demonstrated that the instructors' classrooms were unique places of learning in many respects. It might also be interesting to contrast the perceptions of LINC clients with literacy needs against the perceptions of LINC instructors and LINC assessors to see if there are shared perceptions about reading instruction and reading difficulties. LINC assessors are responsible for completing placement assessments and represent the first point of contact in the LINC program for prospective LINC clients. They are also responsible for determining benchmarks and placement into local programs. Increased communication and collaboration between LINC assessors and LINC instructors could facilitate the placement and integration of new LINC clients. This information could also assist LINC providers in negotiating contracts with CIC by offering a deeper understanding of clients' needs and progress in the LINC program.

### **Conclusion**

This study allowed LINC instructors working in LINC Levels 1-3 to examine their perceptions of reading instruction and clients' reading difficulties within their classrooms. It provided them with a place to reflect on their teaching, their clients' needs, and their abilities to meet these needs. Their responses and the findings of the literature confirm that clients' needs and backgrounds play an important role in classroom

instruction. They influence not only instructional planning, but also the facilitation and assessment of instruction. The instructors identified clients with literacy needs in their classrooms as having special needs that they were not always able to fulfill. More in-depth information about the personal and educational backgrounds of clients needs to be utilized in order to make better decisions about the placement of clients with literacy needs. Increased dialogue between instructors, clients, assessors, providers, and funders of the LINC program may also work to address these challenges and enhance the day-to-day instruction of reading in LINC classrooms. The results of this study hold insights for those who facilitate instruction, assessment, and teacher training and design and those who monitor LINC programs.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Call for Participants**

#### Reading Instruction and Perceptions of Learners' Needs in LINC

##### Level 1-3 Classes

I am a graduate student completing my MEd in the Faculty of Education at Brock University. As part of my thesis, I am investigating LINC instructors' experiences delivering reading instruction as well as their perceptions of learners' needs in context of LINC Level 1-3 classes.

I am looking for LINC Instructors currently teaching, or who have recently taught (within the last two years), LINC Levels 1-3.

#### **Study requirements:**

The study will involve a short questionnaire, and two interviews, each lasting approximately sixty minutes. In the second interview, participants will be asked to provide a copy of their monthly LINC plan for discussion and reflection purposes. *The total time commitment required will be between approximately 2 hours and forty-five minutes for all parts of the study.*

***This study have been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file #:10:008) and the TESL Ontario Research Committee.***

If you are interested in participating, please contact me via email or phone.

**Kim Henrie** (MEd Candidate, Faculty of Education, Brock University)

Email:

Phone:

**Dr. Vera Woloshyn** (Faculty Supervisor, Faculty of Education, Brock University)

Email: [Woloshyn@brocku.ca](mailto:Woloshyn@brocku.ca)

Phone: 905-688-5550, ext. 4212

\*Please note that if interest from LINC instructors to participate in this study greatly exceeds the expectations of the researcher, it may become necessary to limit the number of participants as a function of response order (i.e., participants will include those who provide an affirmative response first).

## Appendix B

### Letter of Invitation and Informed Consent

Date: **August 2010**

Study Title: Reading Instruction and Perceptions of Learners' Needs in LINC  
Level 1-3 Classes

Principal Student Investigator: Kimberley Henrie (MEd Candidate) Faculty of Education Brock University	Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Vera Woloshyn, PhD Graduate/Undergraduate Studies Faculty of Education, Brock University (905) 688-5550, ext. 4212 <a href="mailto:woloshyn@brocku.ca">woloshyn@brocku.ca</a>
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I, Kimberley Henrie (MEd, Candidate) from the Faculty of Education, Brock University, invite you to participate in a research study entitled *Reading Instruction and Perceptions of Learners' Needs in LINC Level 1-3 Classes*.

The anticipated duration of this study is from August 2010 to December 2010.

#### INVITATION

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of LINC instructors with respect to the delivery of reading instruction and their perceptions of learners' needs within the context of the LINC program. Specifically, the instructors' perceptions of how the clients' previous life and educational experiences relate to their experiences in the LINC program as well as how these experiences affect the delivery of reading instruction as well as clients' reading progress will be investigated. Instructors' general instructional and assessment processes will also be reviewed as part of the research study.

#### WHAT'S INVOLVED

You will first be asked to complete a short questionnaire to provide contact and demographic information about your teaching experience. In addition, you will be asked to complete two interviews exploring your experiences with reading instruction and working with LINC clients who experience reading difficulties and/or who do not progress well through the predetermined reading benchmarks. A copy of the



questionnaire and the interview guide are included in this package for your consideration. It is anticipated that each interview, including completion of the questionnaire in the first interview, will require approximately 60 minutes to complete. In the second interview, participants will be asked to provide a copy of their LINC monthly plan as a basis for discussion and reflection. All interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed by a professional transcriber. You will be given an opportunity to review, clarify and reflect on the transcription as well as any interpretations made from it. A total time commitment of 2 hours and 45 minutes is expected for participation in this study including time to complete the two interviews as well as the review and edit the associated transcriptions. Interviews can be carried out either on site or by phone depending on your location and availability. The location and time for on-site interviews will be negotiated by the participant and researcher as part of the scheduling process.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

The potential benefits associated with participating in this research study relate to contributing to the research associated with second language instruction specifically as it relates to LINC programs. The interviews are intended to inspire reflection on classroom planning, practices, as well as factors that influence the progress of LINC clients' towards reading benchmarks. The themes arising from these reflections will provide insight into the needs of clients related to the delivery of reading instruction within LINC Level 1-3 classes. This information may be shared with adult second language educators including other LINC instructors, program managers and assessors. There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information provided by participants will be treated as confidential. Your personal information will not be included, or in any other way, associated with the data collection in this study. The focus of this study will be to identify general trends that emerge from the interview data. Your name

will not appear in any report resulting from this study; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations under a pseudonym may be used. The names and/or titles of employers and organizations also will not be included. Following each interview, I will provide you with a

copy of the transcript as well as any conclusions based on it in order to provide you with an opportunity to review the accuracy of our conversation and to edit, add, or clarify any discussion points and/or concluding comments.

Data collection during this study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the primary student researcher's home. Data will be kept for a maximum of one year, or the length of time required to complete the requirements for the MEd program. Once the data analysis is complete, paper documents will be destroyed, audio recordings will be erased and electronic documents will be deleted. Access to this data will be restricted to Ms. Kimberley Henrie, Dr. Vera Woloshyn, and a professional transcriber who will be bound by a confidentiality agreement.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty. Participation in this study is in no way connected to your professional status within your institution or provincial or local affiliate. Data collected up to the point of withdrawal from the study will be discarded and destroyed. The data collected in this study will be stored securely in the primary student researcher's home and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

### **PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Instructors who participate in at least one interview will be provided with an executive summary of the research findings. Additional feedback about this study will be available from Ms. Kimberley Henrie ([kh07di@brocku.ca](mailto:kh07di@brocku.ca)) and Dr. Vera Woloshyn ([woloshyn@brocku.ca](mailto:woloshyn@brocku.ca)).

### **CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions regarding this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Student Investigator of the Faculty Supervisor using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethical clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University [file # 10:008] and the TESL Ontario Research Committee. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at (905) 688-5550, ext. 3035, or [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca).

Thank-you for your participation. Please retain a copy of this form for your records.

Sincerely,

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**CONSENT FORM**

I agree to participate in the study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Invitation and Consent Letters. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional information about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I also understand that I may withdraw my consent to participate in this study at any time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Interview Prompts

#### Briefing Process

The interviewer will debrief participants at the beginning and the end of the interview to ensure that they are comfortable with the process. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer will review the purpose of the interview as well as the interview process. Participants will also be reminded of their right to skip any question or portion of the study as well as their right to withdraw at any time. Participants will also be provided with the opportunity to ask the interviewer questions about the study. The interviewer will ask:

- Do you have any questions about the study?
- Do you have any questions about the interview process?
- Do you have any additional questions?

At the end of each interview, the interviewer will remind the participants about the transcript review process and thank them for their participation.

#### Interview #1

*Think about your teaching background and teaching experiences.*

1. Tell me a little about your background and how you became involved in the LINC program.

*Think about your daily instruction and interaction with students.*

2. Describe a typical day of instruction in your classroom.
3. What kinds of resources are available to you to assist with your classroom instruction?
4. How does your planning take into account the needs of diverse learners in your class?

*Think about the assessment practices that you use in your classroom.*

5. Tell me about how assessment occurs in your classroom.
6. How are you able to assess the skills of diverse learners?
7. Tell me about how your assessment practices connect with instructional planning in your classroom.

*Think about the different types of students in your classroom, their learning needs and personal experiences.*

8. Tell me about the current, or past, LINC Level 1-3 class that you are/were teaching.

*Think about the backgrounds of your learners with lower proficiencies, ( i.e., CLB 1 or 2 in reading).*

9. Are you able to meet the individual needs of these learners with respect to reading?
10. Are there some learners who have needs that you're not able to meet through classroom instruction and assessment procedures?

*Think about learner backgrounds and previous learning experiences.*

11. Tell me about the LINC backgrounds of these learners, (i.e., their progress through the LINC benchmarks; their initial assessment benchmark)
12. Tell me what you believe are factors that influence clients' reading progress in LINC Level 1-3 classrooms. Describe a classroom situation where such a factor influenced client's learning. Did you modify your instructional techniques in context of this factor(s)?
13. Tell me about the kind of information contained on the referral forms that you receive from LINC assessors.
14. What information is shared about learners' background, previous schooling/disruption in schooling and possible learning difficulties?

Thank-you for your participation. I will email or mail a copy of the transcripts and conclusions based on them to you for your verification within the next two weeks.

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**Interview #2**

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*Reflect on your responses from the first interview.*

1. Is there anything that you would like to add, elaborate, clarify or qualify from that interview?
2. Are there any significant classroom experiences that you would like to share that have occurred since our previous interview?

*Review the monthly LINC plan.*

3. Discuss the reading tasks that you have planned for the month you have provided.
4. Discuss whether you needed to modify the activities presented in the monthly plan to meet the multiple needs in of clients in your class?
5. Did you provide any additional instruction to assist learners whose needs were not met by the reading instruction you had planned?

*Think about reading as a skill.*

6. How do you define a good reader?
7. How do you define success in reading within your LINC classroom?

*Is there anything related to reading instruction and/or the needs of learners in LINC Level 1-3 classes with respect to reading that has not been addressed that you would like to discuss?*

Thank-you for your participation. I will email or mail a copy of the transcripts and conclusions based on them to you for your verification within in the next two weeks.

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## Appendix D

### Demographic Questionnaire

Study Title:     Reading Instruction and Perceptions of Learners' Needs in LINC Level 1-3  
Classes

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information: (phone) \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate if you have a preference about how you are contacted: \_\_\_\_\_

Best days/time(s) to contact you: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Total Years of Teaching Experience: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender (circle one): M     F
3. What LINC level are you currently teaching? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How long have you been teaching this level? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How long have you been teaching in the LINC program? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How much of this time has been spent teaching LINC levels 1-3?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Have you had other teaching experiences outside of the LINC program? If so, please  
explain:  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. In what subject did you complete your undergraduate degree? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you hold a B.Ed. degree and an Ontario Teaching Certificate? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Have you completed or are you currently working toward other degrees? If so, please  
explain:  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. In which city are you currently teaching in the LINC program? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Have you work in the LINC program in other cities? If so, where? How do these experiences compare to your current city?
-



**Appendix E**

**Brock University Research Ethics Board Clearance Certificate**